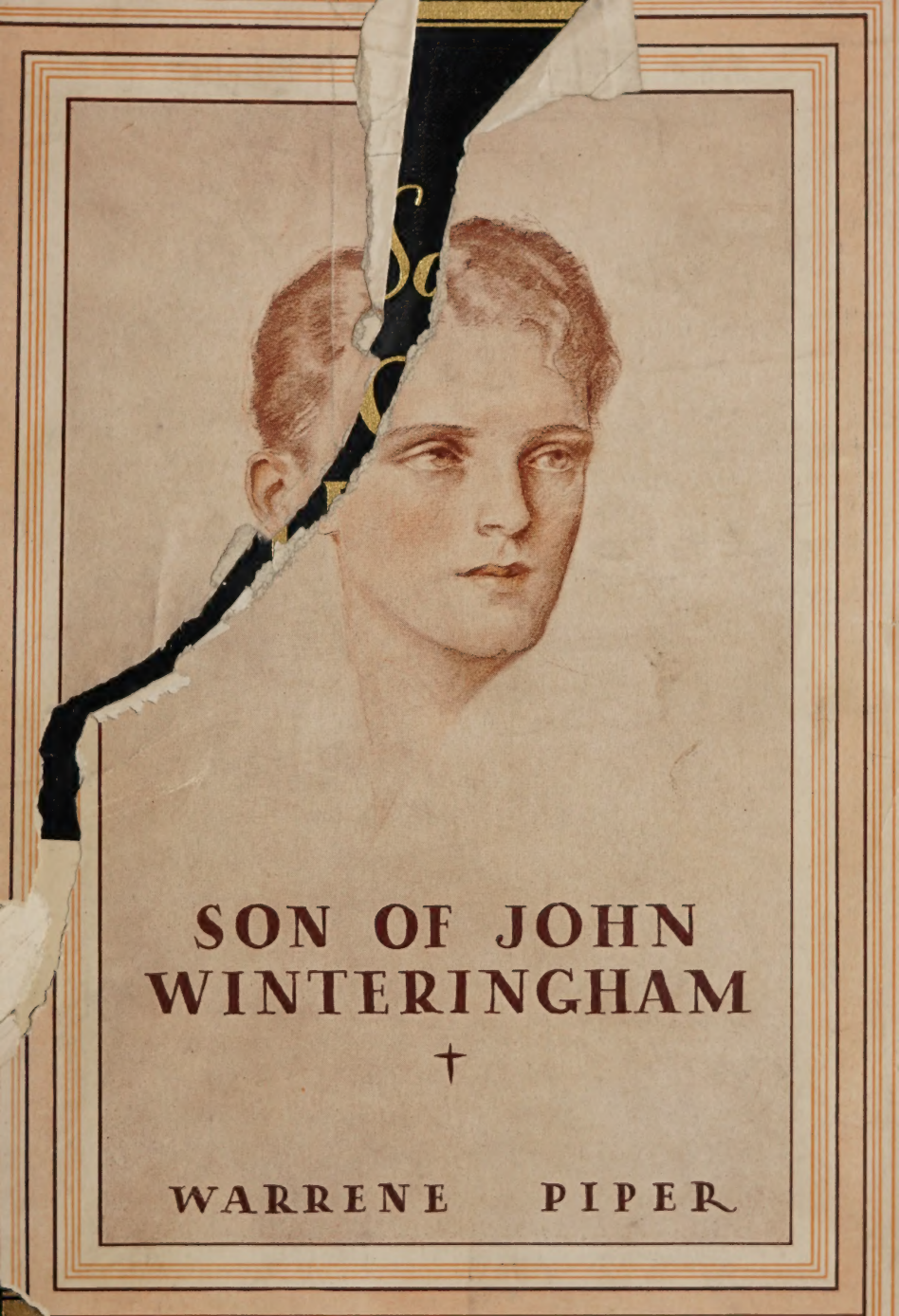

SON OF JOHN WINTERINGHAM

†

WARRENE PIPER

$2.50

SON OF JOHN WINTERINGHAM

By Warrene Piper

JOHN DARCY, a widower with three children of his own, adopts the five orphaned sons of his wife's sister. Darcy, the oldest, had always hated John Winteringham, his father, and, ironically enough, had inherited from him his restless, mercurial disposition. By sheer force of will he manages the unwieldy and strangely assorted family: slow, sturdy-hearted Tony, volatile Jim, reliable Charles, spoiled Jean. His brothers adore him, his uncle's children look up to him for advice. In the end even John Darcy turns to him rather than to his own children for companionship.

Yet in spite of the phenomenal control and philosophy of this boy, he is utterly human. His energy, his passionate, sensitive mind dominate the entire book. Miss Piper has drawn him with uncanny skill. Her book stands out as a brilliant example of unsentimental, delicate, infinitely subtle writing.

Son of JOHN WINTERINGHAM

Warrene Piper

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SON OF JOHN WINTERINGHAM

SON OF JOHN WINTERINGHAM

By

WARRENE PIPER

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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1930

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TO

ELIZABETH

AN APOLOGY

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SON OF JOHN WINTERINGHAM

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INTRODUCTORY

EMINENT Authors, who give advice, insist that people in books should bear names that warn the reader at once whether he is encountering a man or a woman. All the Winteringhams conform unimpeachably to this rule except one. He was not likely to worry about a little thing like breaking rules; but this time he was not consulted. He was named, said those who were kind enough to discuss the affairs of his family, wilfully and maliciously, with intent to annoy, if possible to infuriate, the original owner — a man proud of his name. At a time when and in a class in which it was not done, John Winteringham deliberately filched a good surname and turned it into a bad Christian name. His brother-in-law's surname it was and *that* was no palliative. Mr. Winteringham had not been desired as a brother-in-law.

He named his eldest son Darcy.

John Darcy of Caldersham had married young, outside the county, a woman with no money of her own, the daughter of a teacher of mathematics at a small private school. He had never regretted his choice. His father-in-law he liked, but he had some reason to regret the rest of her relations. Money passed; it was not necessary to see them. He never remembered them when he was not writing a cheque, and, most resolutely of all, he forgot one wearer of a stolen name.

For twelve years he Tempted Providence by his happiness; in the thirteenth year his wife died. He had always lived quietly for a man with his income, now he went nowhere and saw no one. Always interested in his already fair-sized estate, now he became absorbed. He managed the estate himself. He began to buy land, although the rate of return for his investment was not high, while he would at that time have refused, with all the considerable scorn he was capable of, to believe any one who should have the temerity to warn him that that investment was not safe.

A young widower ought to have something better to do than to pore over accounts and agricultural reports. Handsome enough in the Darcy manner — tall, dark and determined — with a large estate (three children, though), the whole county was ready to do what one could for him, found one could do nothing, despaired, left him to himself. At forty, four years after his wife's death, solitary, silent, save on the subject of pigs, for there he was an authority, his only civilized employment was hunting.

It was sad to see a man that might have done anything quite given up to pigs, cattle, and the rotation of crops. By standing on a platform at that juncture and talking about the Country's Food Supply he might have become famous; as it was he actually tried to do something about it himself. This brands him — a confirmed idealist.

In this year — 1902 — died Vere, his wife's sister. He continued to write cheques to support this wife's sister's children. Three years later, on the death of her husband, the offending father of Darcy, the original Darcy took his third false step.

He abandoned himself to his sense of responsibility.

CHAPTER I

SON OF JOHN WINTERINGHAM

For a man of some wealth and position to marry a woman who has neither is no matter for remark, although his choice may seldom fall so far wide of the Chorus; but what is one to say of a man who, after his wife's death, makes himself responsible for the children of his wife's sister simply because they have no other obvious resource? Onlookers began to realize that John Darcy really had a touch of eccentricity.

'Your brother has gone mad,' said Sir Giles Prestwich to his wife, as soon as he heard of it. 'Why can't he marry again like a rational man instead of going about adopting that fellow's children? Any one would say he had enough of his own. I never notice that he has any use for them.'

'No one can expect John to marry again,' said his wife.

He was perfectly aware that Darcy had been infatuated by his wife. Though after all the time they had been married God knows that was unreasonable. It was not as if he had not had time to get over it. However... And hang it all, she'd been dead for years!

This is the only time Sir Giles is known to have been an advocate of second marriage. In general his views on marriage were dark. He was a man who rejoiced in a gloomy imagination. He was always the first to doubt the wisdom of his neighbours' actions; to speak with lowered voice of an illness or family disagreements; the first to notice signs of old age in his friends. Lady

Prestwich, on the other hand, was as nearly devoid of imagination as a human being can be and exist; she had a great capacity for seeing only what she wished to believe and for believing only the most comfortable things. Thus Sir Giles was always assured of contradiction from his wife, an inevitability he had not accepted.

'But what are they to do if he doesn't ——'

That sort of thing, Sir Giles explained, always settled itself if one had the sense to leave it to itself; but it was fantastic, he contended, to rush in and do anything for the family of a fellow of that sort. A man without the slightest notion of honour, leaving the country without paying his racing debts or his I.O.U.s, no sense of property or propriety, drunk when he was not up to anything worse. Darcy had been lucky to ship his precious brother-in-law out of the country; the only mistake he had made was in not doing it thoroughly while he was about it. The Colonies were the place for a man like that.

'Oh, you know John did try to get him to go but he refused ——'

Her brother should never have allowed the fellow a chance to bargain with him; Sir Giles had never concealed his opinion that John Darcy had been absurdly weak in his dealings with his wife's relations — through some confounded idea of sparing her feelings. Feelings! What right had any sensible woman to have feelings about relations of that sort? 'She should have been glad to see them packed off in short order; the farther the better.'

'But you know, as she said, John being such a convinced Imperialist, how could he encourage a man he considered undesirable to settle in one of the dependencies of our Empire?'

'She was joking,' said Sir Giles austerely; for that

young woman had deplorably been given to laughing at her husband. A thing out of nature.

'But when you come to think of it,' said his wife hopefully, 'in such small places where every man does count... perhaps it was just as well for him to go to France where they are so much more used ——'

That, Sir Giles insisted, was not the point; the point was that Darcy had been happy enough to let the fellow go to the Devil out of his sight; why, then, must he go out of his way at this late date to rake up the past? 'What does he expect to do with them, bring them up with his daughters? Little Parisian sewer-rats, probably...'

'Oh, the Winteringhams were quite an old family, they say.'

'Haven't paid their debts for three generations, that sort of family never has the grace to die out. What can he expect of this lot? The father a rascal, the mother a fool ——'

'Oh, do you think so? She always seemed a strong-minded sort of woman to me. And John says, at least, that her father had a wonderful mind in his own way, though, as he was not practical and quite hard to get along with, for most people, they never appreciated the originality of his ideas.'

'Her father's neither here nor there. She must have been a fool or she would never have married him.'

Even Lady Prestwich realized that it would do no good to say that John Winteringham had been the handsomest man she had ever seen. She shifted her ground, a manœuvre she had had much practice in. 'I remember the two little boys when they came down here with their mother. When John was away, you remember?'

Sir Giles grunted: 'Had enough sense not to get

himself entangled before Winteringham died, anyway.'

'Darcy was such a pretty little boy, rather bad-tempered, I'm afraid. He threw a finger-bowl at his mother; though it was filled at the time. It was rather a mistake, perhaps, to let him come in for dessert, but he was generally so amusing and quite good unless he was excited. People spoilt him I suppose. I know they said his father did. Did I say that he was such a handsome child? So like his father...'

'In more ways than one, evidently.'

'Charles was hardly good-looking at all. But very good-natured.'

'Your brother brings them down here... He's lucky if he doesn't find Bess or Anne marrying one of them. His beloved namesake probably.'

'Oh, I don't suppose he will. He hasn't said, but I know their mother's other sister, the one who lives in London, might be got to look after them. They haven't much to live on themselves, you know.'

'He'll be only too lucky if he can pay her to take them all off his hands. How many of them are there?'

'Well, I'm not sure, one heard so little since they left. How long ago was that? I never remember... Let me see... there must be five — no, six, I remember hearing ——'

'Six!' said Sir Giles, in despair. 'The man's an idiot.'

CHAPTER II

DARCY REGRETS HIS FATHER

Sir Giles would have been delighted to know how heartily his brother-in-law was beginning to agree with him; though, in one respect, things were not as black as Sir Giles had feared — there were not six children, only five.

'In such large families it is rare for all the children to survive,' said the Rector of St. Jude's, in a distinctly comfortable voice, a voice that did him the injustice of suggesting that he might feel, though not say, 'happily rare.'

Mr. Darcy felt grimly that five were sufficient, ample, that he should not ask for more. Leaving known Paris behind them they had plunged into this recondite quarter, into neighbourhoods that grew momentarily less and less 'desirable.' He began to realize to the full the inconveniences he had inflicted on himself by giving way to sentiment. This place was not even Bohemian, it was merely squalid; it made him uncomfortable to be seen there. He listened, absent, almost silent, to his guide's attempt to keep up a conversation. Occasional facts and comments pierced the cloud of his gloomy abstraction — they were not calculated to lighten it.

The Reverend Mr. Clough remarked that the neighbourhood was not a good one; but that he understood that the life of the late Mr. Winteringham had not been entirely regular. Mr. Darcy replied, shortly, that it was well known that the life of the late Mr. Winteringham had been extremely irregular. It was perceived that

it was unnecessary to prolong the discussion of Mr. Winteringham.

'I had never met him; but it was thought expedient — in short, I was called upon to officiate...' The man was merely repeating the substance of his letter; now he would go on to 'the circumstances in which he left his children.' Mr. Darcy observed his surroundings with distaste and, in due time, met the expected 'I thought it my duty to communicate with you' with a repetition of his formal thanks.

'I had great difficulty in obtaining your address. For some reason the eldest boy was most obstinate; he seemed to be trying to conceal it.'

Mr. Darcy, in private gloom, thought that it was a pity he had not succeeded.

Mr. Clough now well embarked on the subject of the children, John Darcy learned with little surprise and no pleasure that their education had been neglected, and that their manners were defective — especially those of the eldest. Darcy had made himself obnoxious, his sins were many and various, ranging from 'incomprehensible obstinacy' to 'stark irreverence.' He had, specifically, 'refused in the most resolute manner to attend the funeral service' and when he was at length persuaded to go, he had behaved 'with an unbelievable heartlessness and irreverence'; more particularly he had 'laughed quite audibly during a portion of the service.' This was the sort of young savage he had committed himself to support. He had not expected them to be sufficiently educated to be sent directly to school; as short a time as possible, however, with a tutor, and they should be off his hands except for the holidays, and even then...

'He appears to bully his younger brothers; especially the youngest — a sickly peevish child who cries incessantly.'

John Darcy was rapidly forming a favourable opinion of his young relations. He learnt, rather sceptically, that the others were much better material; that the second (Charles?) appeared to be 'good-natured though somewhat clumsy'; the second-youngest 'stupid but well-meaning'; while the third was a handsome intelligent child. Mr. Darcy inwardly congratulated himself on having selected these three for himself.

They picked their way up the dirty, dingy stairs to the sixth or top floor, conducted by an old woman who took a vivid and slightly inconvenient interest in their affairs. One wondered if she were a person in authority or if she was only satisfying her own curiosity. At any rate it was impossible to stop her chatter and almost as impossible to understand it. The affair was becoming more and more acutely uncomfortable; the August heat was stifling in that unaired confinement; the Reverend Mr. Clough was panting slightly. Damn the fellow, thought John Darcy irresistibly, why had he interfered? He waited irritably while his companion knocked.

'What is it?' A voice, cautiously, in French.

'Open the door, my boy,' said Mr. Clough in an ecclesiastical tone, one of calm authority.

'Go to the Devil,' replied another voice sharply, in English this time.

Darcy evidently.

It is difficult to be at once dignified, persuasive and authoritative through a locked door. Mr. Clough made the effort. Darcy and the old woman enjoyed the performance; John Darcy did not. He asked the old woman if she had a key; she had not, it appeared, which confirmed the suspicion that she was a volunteer; in any case the door was bolted, not locked. She had other resources, however; speaking into the wide crack of the door she loosed a piercing flight of words. Mr. Darcy

gathered hazily that she was ashamed of the way his nephew treated the gentlemen who were kind enough to visit them. It was not, God knew, that they could afford to offend rich visitors, when one reflected for how many days the rent had been due, not to speak of that cursed child who cried to bring down the house, and continually. Only that morning had she heard many that complained and even threatened to cause ——

The door opened and shut with the rapidity and illusory effect of a conjuring trick. One would have sworn that it had not been opened but for the sharp sound of its shutting and the presence of Darcy on the outside. An effective entrance; he was, at this period, frequently effective. 'Savage' had been the correct word; he had all a savage's magnificent quickness and dexterity. Theatrical, his uncle reflected, and exceedingly like his father; and he disliked him all the more. Tall, fair, very thin, obviously furious, blue eyes curiously distended and black with rage (stagey that, abominably), as he flamed against the dark door at his back he seemed to catch and reflect all the light in the place. Evidently a natural talent for the limelight.

He devoted himself to the old woman. The words were unintelligible but effective; their quality John Darcy judged fairly accurately by their effect on the clergyman and, more especially, on the old woman. No ordinary vituperation could have routed her; yet it was delivered in a low, almost a calm, voice. She made a feigned attempt at a reply but it was an imperfect effort. Darcy passed over it in contempt and waited with exaggerated patience while she tottered to the stairs, not the active creature she had been; after which he had leisure to inspect his visitors; and he was displeased. He scowled at the Reverend Mr. Clough and wondered audibly if It had a brain.

'Why not tell me? I thought you were alone.'

He swept open the door and stood, tall, against it to let them pass.

'Come in quietly, please. He is only just asleep, it is *possible* that you *may* not have waked him.'

As the light of the room found him, a black smear on his left cheek was a point of irony commenting on his dignity. His uncle was relieved to notice, however, that it was adventitious; the cheek beneath was clean; the room, also, small, stifling, and scarcely furnished, was passably clean; compared with their surroundings, in fact, they were both superlatively clean. The room was unoccupied; the door into the other room shut. Darcy, in silence, collected two chairs — small, straight-backed, uncomfortable — placing them by the open window; and, as they were all the chairs there were, prepared himself to stand. Chairs were not much in use in his establishment; when one sat, one sat on the bed or on the table which together filled most of the room.

A Pause.

Each maintained his own variety of silence; Darcy's coldly indifferent with a grain of insolence, his uncle's a dignified composure covering distaste and annoyance, Mr. Clough's outraged indignation.

He broke silence first: 'This,' he said accusingly, 'is the boy of whom I spoke.'

A small line about Darcy's mouth deepened; he knew fairly well what must have been said. His uncle did not seem to find him worthy of comment.

'This is your uncle.'

Darcy continued to observe him in silence; he had been watching him openly ever since they had entered the room. To Mr. Clough it seemed that they had entered on a competition in silence. He had had a foretaste of what the elder could do in that line already that

afternoon, but he had not seen Darcy tongue-tied before. No doubt there was a certain awkwardness; but he was used to taking charge, and to rearranging the lives of others for their own good. He was prepared now; he cleared his throat. Darcy slid in deftly, snatching the situation from his grasp, speaking softly in his French-touched English.

'This is a family affair — perhaps.'

An impersonal-sounding statement containing a perceptible question. His uncle looked up quickly and that instant's exchanged glance said silently — I think so — Yes, so do I. Mr. Darcy was relieved; no one relished less than he the idea of a semi-public discussion of his intentions, of money matters, of his brother-in-law and all his works. Darcy was relieved; to communicate with this man it was not necessary to go and shout in his ear; if He wished to do without the other he could contrive it; he had brought him, let him get rid of him.

'Yes,' said John Darcy meditatively, 'as you say, it is — a family affair.'

A slight pause.

'Ah — er — exactly,' said Mr. Clough, 'a family affair. And, necessarily, my connection with it now ceases. I am much relieved to be able to turn it over to some one qualified to take charge. I have felt all along that there must be those who would gladly take up the responsibility, moral and otherwise, for these destitute children. If my intervention has brought that about, I shall regard my attempts with feelings of the highest satisfaction.'

John Darcy in reply was suitable, while his nephew, standing aside, admired his suave method of dispatch, no waste of words but no lack of appreciation. And then it was: 'I trust you will not miss your way back,' and 'I believe I marked the route pretty thoroughly.'

And Darcy shut the door, coming slowly across the room ready for the really serious part of the interview. He avoided the other chair to sit on the table, facing the light, eyes shut to slits in the glare of the afternoon sun. In the full light he did not seem so close a copy of his father; he had none of John Winteringham's easy good-humoured charm. He was not nearly as handsome; his features, even now, were more strongly marked, and the expression — the bad temper of the line between the eyes, and the obstinacy of the jaw — emphasized the difference. The owner of that face should be a fighter, and, probably, he would be difficult to handle; cool-headed, he would not rush his fences as his father had done; confident, too, he would leave his opponent to choose the ground. It struck John Darcy that the boy had been used to an adversary who made mistakes. He smiled grimly — if that was what he was waiting for...

Darcy took the lead again unexpectedly; possibly he, too, saw a difference in the quality of his opponent. And his lead was disconcerting — confidence. 'I thought he had come to save our souls,' he explained gravely, 'and it was not convenient.'

His uncle hesitated, then accepted the offered truce. If the boy had enough sense to see that opposition was useless, why should he complicate a situation already unpleasant enough by driving him to hopeless rebellion? He was not going to be responsible for Darcy financially or morally and, if he wished, there was no doubt that he could make trouble — he was, palpably, that sort of boy. He sacrificed Clough to concord with a conventional: 'If he had not written to me I should not have known of your position.'

'As destitute children?' Darcy was plainly incredulous. 'And the cheques then? Why, I tell you, if he had

not interfered, there would be you still in England writing cheques *as usual*, not bothering much, and there would be us here having the money *as usual*, and no one having any trouble at all.'

An idyllic picture, that appealed to both of them.

'And what about endorsing the cheques?' he inquired, wondering with faint amusement if Darcy had been proposing to forge his father's signature.

'Yes,' Darcy smiled slightly, admitting, 'that was why I gave him your address. I thought of writing to you and then I thought that it would be easier to talk. You see I did not know it would be so hot for travelling.' Courteous apology could go no further. Darcy abandoned sympathy abruptly. 'Why must you be so careful?' he said impatiently. 'If you'd written bearer cheques you would never have known.'

Mr. Darcy, for the moment, regretted it himself; he knew that it would not have made much difference to substitute Darcy for his father painlessly at long range, but now his sense of responsibility had been roused, he had made certain arrangements, and there was Clough in the background.

Darcy tried to seize the moment of harmony; he said, carefully reflective: 'I could arrange things as well as he — better. In fact he never did anything but cash the cheques...'

But his uncle's sense of responsibility was too much for him.

'How do I know you will not spend it on yourself?'

'You don't, of course,' said Darcy almost inaudibly. His uncle was surprised that he did not point out the fact that there had been no guarantee of any sort exacted from his father; but Darcy, seeing that it was settled and knowing the bitterness of defeat, was not likely to try to lighten it by scoring debating points.

He locked his long fingers, nursing one knee, and said slowly:

'And you have decided?'

'You, being the eldest,' his uncle distinguished it carefully, 'are to go to work ——'

'I prefer that,' said Darcy quickly; gratuitous, it made no difference whether he did or not.

'In London. I believe that Stokes, that is, the husband of your mother's sister, Lavinia,' Darcy nodded, 'has found a position for you there.'

'And the others?'

'The others — I don't know their names ——'

'Charles, Jacques, Antoine, Jean,' said Darcy rapidly, 'in order of age.'

'Then Charles, James, and Anthony will come with me to Caldersham. I shall send them to school when they are ready for it, give them a sound education and an opportunity to make a good start in life.'

'Jean?' Darcy was unmoved by his uncle's generosity and his brothers' good fortune.

'The youngest goes to a cousin of your mother's who lives in Devon.'

'No,' said Darcy, with sudden energy, a startling contrast to his whole previous manner. 'Not Jean. You can't. He's ill. He is afraid of strangers. If you take him away he will be worse. No one would take him if they knew how — you have not heard him cry yet. He is a little devil and I am the only one who can stop him. I go away for one afternoon only and he is impossible all that night.'

'Is he really ill? What is the matter with him?'

'How should I know? Yes, I think he is very ill.'

Here was an obstacle and, undeniably, a serious one. The Devonshire cousin had young children.

'Is it infectious — catching?'

'Nobody else has it yet, if that is what you mean.'

John Darcy shirked the task of discussing the nature of infection with a boy whose knowledge of English contained such unexpected lacunæ.

'What did the doctor say?' he asked impatiently.

'Doctor!' Darcy laughed.

'You don't mean to say that he has not seen one!'

'Si,' said Darcy, cheerfully. 'But I know where there is one if you want him to come. The one who signed the papers about my father — that was a nuisance. Do you want me to send for him?'

'Yes, of course.' It was really very awkward; if this child was seriously ill, it might be weeks before they could get away from the place. It was most inconvenient. It upset all his plans.

Darcy whistled; two notes so high and shrill as to be almost unbearable.

'He may be out, or he may not be able to come, but —— Charlot,' with a quick change in tone, but without turning his head, 'va chercher ——' Followed a torent of instructions in French.

John Darcy inspected the newcomer with more interest than he had felt for anything that day; this boy would be one of his charges. He had come in quietly, taking no notice of their visitor; it was clear that he was accustomed to his brother's ordinance. Not as tall as Darcy, one year younger, much more solidly built, good-natured certainly, that was what one noticed first; but clumsy his uncle did not agree to, or it could be only by contrast; compact, he might prove stronger than Darcy. He should be useful at football, perhaps at cricket; with training he might be a boxer. John Darcy noticed his shoulders and arms with approval — unusual reach. He looked not unintelligent. He knew how to obey. He took his instructions with a competent air,

and left without a word. His uncle was satisfied — Charles was good material.

Darcy flung after him, 'Is he awake?' and his frown deepened at the expressive quality of Charles's 'Yes!'

'I'd better go in,' he said hastily. 'Are you waiting to see the doctor? Do you want to see the others?'

'Better to have his opinion, perhaps; I shall stay to see if he comes, that is, if it is not too long. I suppose I might as well see the others. By the way, what I have just told you ——'

'I'll tell them that, later,' Darcy offered uneasily.

'That will save time,' said his uncle, satisfied, although how it would save time or why it was necessary to save it, he could not have explained.

Jacques and Antoine were produced for his benefit. The handsome, intelligent child proved, as one might have expected, to be the image of his father — no great recommendation. The other, small and sturdy, was an entirely ordinary-looking little boy; he might be stupid but it was not particularly evident. One saw, at a glance, his likeness to Charles; both of them, as far as one could remember her, resembled their mother. John Darcy had no talent for children and he did not find much entertainment in a couple of boys of eleven and twelve. He had nothing to ask and they nothing to communicate. They stood looking at him with more curiosity than shyness and refused to attempt to talk English. Here was another annoying drawback. Darcy relieved the growing impression of awkwardness by dismissing them to watch for Charles. Their uncle regarded their prompt obedience with a complacent eye. It was not obedience assumed for the occasion, it was habitual. He recognized its full value; it should prove an incalculable benefit. No one could say that their education had been entirely neglected. John Darcy could

have asked for no better trait than the habit of obedience, and, once they were removed from their elder brother's influence, one might reasonably hope that they would prove to be equal to their opportunities.

Darcy stood up. 'I must go in,' he said restlessly. He had been, patently, listening for sounds from the next room ever since Charles's departure. 'Do you want to see him, too?'

It was advisable, perhaps; it would give him an idea whether this threat of delay was serious or not. It was useless to try to get much information from Darcy. His English, fair on the surface, gave out surprisingly at the edges. The progressive denationalization of the whole family was remarkable... what was the word for it, un-Englished... de-Anglicized? An unnatural process, and all done in seven years. Still, there had been no connection with other English people and the children had been young; the youngest had been born in France, he remembered.

As they entered the room, they surprised the child in the act of getting out of bed. Not for long, however; illness had not made him languid, it seemed; in a flash he was a very small hump under the bedclothes and a tumbled mass of black hair on the pillow.

'Yes,' said Darcy drily, 'I should stay there!'

John Darcy mentally condemned the superstition that two fair-haired people could not have a dark-haired child. John Winteringham the younger was a sufficiently amusing contrast to his brothers. Seen only for a second, his queer heart-shaped face, with the slash of black brows across it, was enough to stamp his individuality on the mind of a casual observer. Young John was no beauty, certainly, but his personality was noticeable — and unlovable. John Darcy had not had his presence so thoroughly and obviously resented in his

life, and all in silence. Of all the varieties of silence that had pervaded the small apartment that afternoon, that of Jean was by far the most potent. It was natural, almost permanent. Jean had only two states of being; he wept or he was silent. It was seldom that he consented to talk, never to strangers, never in English.

'You see he does not like strangers,' said Darcy, resigned. He knew well enough the futility of expecting Jean to act in any social capacity. As a means of filling in an odd half-hour for their inconvenient visitor, he was worse than useless. Indeed, if the man offered to examine him or to touch him in any way, there would be a magnificent scene.

Luckily his uncle elected to find the situation amusing. The suspicion that Darcy, with his confident mastery of his other brothers, might be defied and made helpless by this shred touched his sense of humour. He bestowed an inward glance of compassion on the unconscious Devonshire family, waiting to receive this young tartar. His own choice had been almost clairvoyant. He contemplated it with entire satisfaction. He looked at the room — smaller and barer than the other, if that was possible — benignly and commended it.

'You keep this place clean,' he said, with approval.

'It has to be, when people are sick,' said Darcy, vaguely giving voice to his tradition. He had inherited from his mother only two things — an idea that milk ought to be boiled and the belief, amounting to a superstition, that cleanliness was health. The item of soap on the list of his expenses was one of the causes of the deepening line on his forehead. He, himself, and the other three, being perfectly healthy, could get along with water, but his theory was visited with full rigour on Jean. Even his heavy hair was soft and fuzzy with washing.

Jean wriggled with irritation at his uncle's words... was Darcy to be commended for his mad behaviour? Only this morning... oh, he would become worse and worse... Darcy cast a meaning, 'You heard?' at his resentful back as he followed their uncle out of the room.

The wild English family were well-known objects of curiosity to their neighbours. This may or may not have had something to do with the readiness of Doctor Leroux to answer the laconic message delivered, in record time, by Charles. Introduced discreetly by Charles, who preferred to remain in the corridor, he was very thankfully received and well rewarded by the sight of this impressive well-dressed stranger, but he was not invited to linger. Darcy took him in hand immediately. They addressed themselves to the almost impossible task of making Jean submit to his examination. John Darcy was left to meditate on this interruption of his arrangements, to debate the probability of infection, and to make and remake his plans...

'Well?'

'As one might have expected,' Doctor Leroux breathing on his glasses polished them elaborately, 'malnutrition.'

At least it was not infectious.

'Is it a serious case?'

'Serious? Ah, that depends. If he is to continue here with conditions unchanged,' Leroux shrugged, 'I would not be responsible for the result. With a proper care and diet, it is certainly not too late... He is undersized, and I doubt if he will ever possess what one could be justified in describing as a digestion. Still, I should say that he had a remarkable constitution — originally — and with the right care he may do very well. I do not say that he will ever be strong. But with reasonable precautions there is, in fact, no reason why he should

not outlive his brothers, if that is all... I will give you a list of things necessary,' he added to Darcy.

John Darcy was surprised to find him there, unobtrusive. He had seated himself in his old place on the table, head tilted far back; one hand steadied him on the table's edge, the other curled about his ankle. He nodded indifferently, unclasped his ankle, and with this hand shielded from his uncle's view, he made the universal Continental gesture. The doctor answered it at once:

'These things,' he said, in a low voice, to Mr. Darcy, 'will be necessary, and I do not think that the boy has the money ——'

Darcy received the money listlessly, stumbled over the chair, kicked it aside, left it to lie, and went to lean on the outside door, instructing Charles. Evidently the head of the family did not run on errands. His uncle watched him, ironically; that would be changed for him in the future...

'A queer type,' observed Doctor Leroux, 'I find him extremely interesting. He was rather in difficulties when I was here last.'

'So he told me,' said John Darcy absently; here was another Frenchman, the man must talk.

'He told you!' Doctor Leroux was astonished. 'The audacity!' he chuckled. 'And yet very like him... So he told you that; I had not thought him likely to confide...'

'He simply said that there was trouble about the papers.'

'Oh, the papers — there always is; but that was not what —— Let me explain. It was well known here that there had been much hatred between this one, the eldest, and his father. I believe that, notoriously, he punished them all brutally. Of course, under these cir-

cumstances, the good neighbours were well prepared to believe the worst. And, indeed, I believe that there had been many violent scenes that might give rise to such a belief. I was able easily to prove, however, that the death was from entirely natural causes. I fear I gave these good people some disappointment. But it was the attitude of the boy, himself, that interested me. He took it with the greatest sangfroid, without protest or resentment. As far as I could discover the only comment he ever made was that his father once said: "Darcy will doubtless live to be hanged, but not for murdering me." And he added that on that occasion his father, perhaps for the first time in his life, had been indulging himself with the truth.... Yes, a queer type....'

He caught the boy on his return and to John Darcy's annoyance began a cross-examination.

'Come here, my friend,' said the doctor, 'tell me what have you been eating? When did you eat last?'

'I forget,' said Darcy impatiently. 'What does it matter? I am perfectly well.'

'Evidently,' said Doctor Leroux sarcastically. 'Also you slept last night, naturally.'

'You are being funny?' Darcy was indifferent. 'If you will tell me how any one is to sleep with *That* crying all night!'

'Come, then, you slept the night before.'

Darcy said nothing.

'Tell me how long has he been ill.'

Darcy had a grievance, it burst forth.

'Oh, he had been ill in ways for a long time, but — last Thursday he was more ill. I did not want to go away, naturally; but that animal from St. Jude's made me and I had to leave him with the old fool from

down-stairs. When I came back I found he was much worse ——'

'Has he been bad ever since?'

'Enough.'

'You know you were very careless. You should have sent for me much earlier.'

'You would have come, naturally, knowing that I could not pay you,' scornfully. 'That one from St. Jude's paid for the other, and this one will pay for this. But I — I had nothing.'

'Ah,' said Doctor Leroux softly, 'so you find it necessary to insult me.'

'Am I a fool, then,' said Darcy rapidly, 'to send for a doctor to tell me to feed him champagne and oysters and — what do I know else? When I do know that I have not even ——' he stopped short.

'And that,' said the doctor, pleased, 'brings us back to the question of your diet.'

'Why don't you mix in your own affairs?' cried Darcy, annoyed, 'I am not your patient!'

'No, but you will be if — show me that hand, your right —' he secured it by a swoop and examined it with interest. The middle finger was crooked with a thick ridge that looked like an extra joint.

'That,' said Darcy easily, 'is quite all right. I did that years ago; that is what comes of having such silly long fingers. It hurt for a while.'

'I should think it did; that finger was broken. You did nothing for it, I suppose.'

'No — it,' said Darcy casually, 'was a nuisance.'

'You broke it playing some of your English games, doubtless?'

'Playing,' said Darcy grimly, 'with an Englishman.'

Doctor Leroux beamed upon him, becoming friendly, almost affectionate.

'Let me advise you,' he said. 'After we have gone you are to take yourself what I have ordered for the other. Then lie down and rest — sleep, you understand me, and let no one — where are you going?' with a hand on his arm.

Darcy jerked it away. 'Oh, let me go! He'll begin again, if I don't go when he calls me.'

He was across the room and the door shut on his: 'Tais-toi, imbécile ——'

'He has good ears,' said Doctor Leroux, 'I had not heard ——' He watched him go with pleasure. 'Graceful young animal, but too thin; that will be not more than one meal a day for how long?'

'Surely you don't think — the others don't strike one as underfed.'

'Yes. What is that... droit d'ainesse?' Doctor Leroux was absent. 'Pulse irregular and low — probably higher than the average normally, though. Nervous, too, like the other, and knows it; did you notice the care he takes to keep his hands hidden or employed? Knows something about nerves, that probably accounts for the way he controls the little one. I found it most striking, I assure you.'

'When can he travel?'

'To England? Nothing to prevent that whenever you like. The boat will be bad, of course, but it will be an advantage to get him away from this and, after all, rest and a proper diet are the important—— '

'Do you think it would be bad for him to be sent to strangers?'

'Entire strangers? Alone? You mean to take him from his brother? I should call that making unnecessary trouble. For the child — yes, it would be very bad for him at present; and for the strangers worse, I should not envy them. He is a highly nervous subject, and

a crying child is a wearing thing to have in a house.'

John Darcy reflected. It was not so bad; he need not be detained . . . .

'Then you think it would be better to leave them together until he is sufficiently recovered? It might be arranged for him to stay in London with Darcy until — yes, it might be arranged.'

'I should think it highly desirable.' Leroux hesitated, then he said earnestly, 'I would not interfere but — must they be separated? After all, family affection is a thing sufficiently rare; we take a great responsibility if we meddle with it. Brotherly affection ——'

'I think there's no question of that in this case,' said John Darcy easily. Doctor Leroux opened his mouth and on second thoughts shut it again, without speaking. He eyed the other, speculative, silent. Could it be that he had not remarked, or was this merely an example of the well-known Anglo-Saxon hypocrisy? Rather late in the day it occurred to him that he had been treating the affair very freely. He knew little of the other's connection with this family. This was not the man to pardon an intrusion.

'Then we may leave at any time.'

Doctor Leroux bowed.

John Darcy had had no notion of taking any foreigner into his confidence, but struck by a dreadful thought a cri de cœur escaped him. 'Their clothes!' he exclaimed in despair. 'How can they travel as they are?'

'If I should advise,' said Dr. Leroux hesitantly, 'I should say give the money to the eldest boy and tell him to see to it. He is very capable of managing and they all obey him.'

'Would you trust him with the money?'

'Trust him! Why not? He is honest. Did you not

hear him say that he would not send for me because he could not pay me?'

'I heard him give another excuse,' drily.

'Yes, that; but sometimes it is a comfort to hear that it is only what you think and not some horrible mystery — especially at night, when the justly famed human imagination has a chance to work. That one has worried, trust me; I know the signs... Oh, he is honest, any one here could tell you that... honest within bounds, of course.'

John Darcy failed to see himself leading five nephews about from outfitter to outfitter, especially if they were wearing their present clothes. The worst that Darcy could accomplish must be better than that.

'I believe I shall take your advice,' he said, and discovered the time with dismay. 'Where is he?' he asked impatiently.

He summoned Darcy, gave him concise instructions, poured what seemed to Darcy floods of money upon him and left on the hour; with luck he would be back in time to dress for dinner. He was dining with an old acquaintance.

Left alone with M. le docteur, Darcy found himself forcibly seated, provided with a glass of unknown content; he sniffed it doubtingly.

'Drink it, or I shall take you into the other room and make you drink it to encourage the little one... That is right.'

The doctor looked him over, keenly. He was evidently too tired to pretend to resent this forcible handling; he was not even trying to control the telltale twitch of his hand.

'I advised your uncle not to take the child away at present,' he said, and saw the boy stiffen instantly, 'not until he is very considerably better.'

'How long?' swiftly.

'A month or two perhaps. He will go with you to London and stay there until he is well enough to go away. I tried to suggest that it was a pity to send him away but it was not acceptable. I am sorry that is all I can do for you. If it is to be prevented you must do the rest yourself —' he had a glance from Darcy that satisfied him — 'two — yes, certainly two — months will give you time to look about you.'

'Yes,' said Darcy, 'thank you.' He replaced the glass on the table with nice attention and searched in his mind for a more suitable form of words, finding none.

'You are exhausted,' said Doctor Leroux compassionately, 'go and lie down.'

'Oh, there are things to do.'

'Let the others do them, get up early to-morrow if you must, but go now. See — do you want to be ill?'

Darcy considered.

'What are these things to do? For that man? You are a disappointment to me, do you know.' Doctor Leroux bantered him, not unkindly. 'You give up everything to him without a skirmish. He takes him away from you, and you do not object; on the contrary, you do all for him without a word. You surprise me; I thought you would fight the Devil, and you give in without a struggle.'

'Struggle,' said Darcy coldly, 'how? I have nothing. My father had an annuity and what this man gave him. Can I, by doing marvels of work, support five people? And this man with all his arrangements made! The only way was to deceive him in the beginning, and as soon as I remembered the endorsements I knew I was finished. I could make myself a nuisance — yes; but he is not the sort of man — I will tell you the sort of man he is ——' He was flushed and beginning to talk

rapidly, though in a low voice. Leroux was conscious that he ought to quiet him, but one had one's curiosity...

'If he likes you, you need not worry, for you can do anything; and if he dislikes you, what good will it do you to worry — for you can do nothing. Am I to go out of my way to make such a man angry, when all the world can see that he is furious already? What a good idea! I do not have to worry certainly, because I shall not have to live with him; but the others then! I should prepare a warm welcome there for them, perhaps; and you say, object! How can I object? What is there to object to? He will do everything for them and I can do nothing at all. I tell you it is too good to object to. It is all very good — very fine; he will do all that and I —— He will take them away from me and I — I — I will have to tell them that...

'Damn it all,' said Darcy, depressed, 'I almost wish my father hadn't died.'

CHAPTER III

JEAN LEARNS AND ACTS

JOHN DARCY passed through the ordeal of travelling with five French-clad nephews with unexpected ease — to himself. It resolved itself into placing them in a railway carriage with instructions not to move, finding a seat in another carriage, placing Jean (and Darcy) in the care of a stewardess, warning the others to meet him on the wharf, placing them in another railway carriage, supplying a stimulant for Jean, who appeared to be in a state of collapse (one wondered what they did on channel-boats if one wanted a doctor — it might have been well to inquire), finding a smoking-carriage, and meeting them in London. It had been a relief to find Jean a little recovered, his look of collapse had been alarming. He was still inert in Darcy's arms, eyes closed, but his colour, his breathing — he was undoubtedly the better for the stimulant. John Darcy turned his attention to the problem of delivering two nephews in an outlying part of London and conveying the other three to another railway station to catch the Caldersham train. With his eye on his watch, he decided that it would be a close thing; if he took his eye off them for a second, he was convinced that that train must be missed. He hailed a cab — two cabs. Six people, two hansom cabs, he was spared the effort of calculation by finding himself alone on the pavement — alone with Charles. The other cab was filled. Luckily they were all thin.

It is possible to pity Charles, in that long silent drive

across London, helpless, isolated from the friendly tangle of arms and legs in the other cab, side by side with dread Authority, facing the idea of leaving... soon, soon... the time spun itself out interminably. Nervously he gripped the edge of the seat. He should have said good-bye in the train, then there would have been no need... under his uncle's eye... shake hands and say nothing, that was the only safe way. The others... lucky in the other cab, no one to see... they were stopping, it was impossible that it could have been so short. Mrs. Stokes was on the pavement to meet them. There was not time to go in; their train must be caught. There was Darcy, utterly correct on the step of the cab, leaning over to shake hands with his uncle, then... he barely touched his hand, he should have said something, anything, was this all — Darcy! He did not know whether he said it or only thought... His uncle spoke to the cabman. Only a minute now... Then Darcy flashing back caught him in a hug that left him breathless, ashamed, and satisfied, took a flying jump from the briskly moving cab, reaped a protesting Jean from a bewildered aunt, took the steps in his stride, and banged the front door after him.

Interested neighbours saw Mrs. Stokes ringing her own front door-bell.

For two months John Darcy enjoyed what his friends, and his brother-in-law, agreed to consider unmerited peace. He had invited trouble and trouble had not hastily responded. His nephews were docile beyond his expectation. It is true that they had lost their leader; and it is, perhaps, too much to expect of the most resilient spirit to feel undaunted by so many changes — above all, the startling undreamed-of ceremonial of living prosperously. It was like a nightmare, every one

else clothed in knowledge, they alone with nothing on. In addition they had had precise instructions from Darcy, coupled with a biting description of what should happen to imbeciles who refused their chance in life because they did not happen to like some of the conditions. And Darcy was not accustomed to have his instructions disregarded.

So far he was ridden by common sense, but the writ of common sense did not run in the case of Jean. He had two months, he prepared silently for a struggle. Jean was the last thing left, all that remained of the old life, and, if only because he was the most troublesome, he had always been the most valuable of his brothers. Jean, in ignorance of coming danger, accepted life in London without approval — and who could have expected him to accept strangers with equanimity? — but without, after the first few days, excessive condemnation. The day was a desert, but, when Darcy came back from work, he had him to himself. As far as Jean was concerned, the others might never have existed. Jean had few needs, but his necessities were essentials. Ultimately they reduced themselves to one — Darcy. He had never contemplated existence without Darcy; he did not waste his time considering impossibilities.

Darcy had spent some time considering it and he was not without his plans, but he was taken off his guard, defeated in advance by his ignorance of the customs of the household. His aunt and uncle were given to passionate discussion over the arrangement of every petty detail of private life; why, then, should he not expect to have warning? His uncle, however, had long learned the importance of presenting his wife with a fait accompli in any major matter. Ordinary affairs she might muddle and spoil, everything else had to be done

for her. Nothing was said, therefore, until he could inform her that all was settled; and Darcy's plans were completely upset before any one had suspected that he had plans.

It is undoubtedly true that, had Jean possessed more shirts, nothing could have saved him from Devonshire. Owing to some one's misguided economy, he had but three; consequently he spent much of his life waiting for the washing to come home. On the other hand, had Mrs. Stokes been an intelligent woman or one even moderately perceptive, she might long ago have discovered that, for that flow of small fact and trivial detail on which her soul fed and was, miraculously, nourished, it was useless to depend on Jean or, for that matter, Darcy. Irrelevant detail passed through their minds as through a sieve; for both of them, the correct answer to, 'Did you shut, or lock, the door, or window?' was 'I don't know'; if they were asked, 'Have you brushed your hair?' they sought a looking-glass, answering according to appearances. This was what it was to have had no early training. Jean was capable of forgetting that he had not breakfasted; Darcy, that he had. It was useless to expect them to remember where she had left anything, or to have any knowledge of her household arrangements. Yet, at the end of two months, she could not be said to have learned this; all her life she had been incapable of deriving knowledge from facts, or of acting on such knowledge as had been forced upon her by others. She lived, acted, and thought exclusively at second-hand. Therefore — 'Have your shirts come back from the wash?' She was in her customary state of agitation.

'No,' said Jean, at a venture; on these occasions he always said 'no' on principle.

Calamity descended on Aunt Lavvy. 'Not back!

But this is Thursday! How,' she inquired dramatically, 'can you go to Devonshire without a clean shirt? You can't go without ——'

'I will not go there, then,' said Jean calmly. He had no desire to go anywhere. Change was repugnant to him.

'Frank Harris has come up to take you down,' said Aunt Lavvy absently; she regretted audibly that the washerwoman had no telephone.

'Why?' Jean helped himself to plate-polish liberally. Aunt Lavvy having discovered his neatness of hand, he had been set to work. He was slow, yet she admitted that she had never had a servant who cleaned silver more to her satisfaction.

'Because you are going to live with him,' abstracted. 'Now if I was to send ——'

'But Darcy, how will he come to work?' asked Jean, carefully inserting the chamois between the tines of a fork.

Aunt Lavvy complained that Celia was always out when she was wanted.

'Darcy isn't going.' Darcy, of course, Darcy should go and get them.

'Not going?' said Jean softly. 'He will stay here, then?'

'No — that is, of course he will stay here. But if he's late, he always is ——'

Jean put down the chamois and the fork. His manner was decisive.

'Where are you going? What are you going to do?'

'I am going to be very ill,' said Jean definitely.

When she had partly recovered from her astonishment, Aunt Lavvy, in a desultory way, followed him. She found his jacket in the hall, his shirt on the foot of the stairs, his trousers half-way up; with dismay she

encountered under-clothing in the upstairs hall; as she entered the room she stumbled over his shoes; coming to the side of the bed she stepped on a tangle of night clothes. Jean had realized instantly, that, as long as he was in a state of nature, he was safe. Before they could take him anywhere they would have to force some sort of clothing on him. He had no idea when they intended to drag him away. He hastened to place himself in safety.

Blotted out beneath a sheet, two blankets, and a counterpane, he had time to meditate the full horror of the thing that threatened him. He caught his breath and fell into the paroxysm of silent sobbing that was only a preliminary....

'You are a naughty little boy,' said his aunt inadequately. It was true that she had no idea of what was in store for her.

No one could have expected her to know how to handle him, still it was a gratuitous mistake to touch him. Jean advertised murder to the world at large. Under these circumstances the only wise course to pursue was to shut the windows and door, hoping the neighbours were from home, and leave him alone until he had exhausted his excellent voice. Aunt Lavvy did not pursue it.

By the time Darcy came home Jean was now sobbing with deadly monotonous regularity and the unmistakable note of hysteria; he had reduced his aunt to a state bordering on his own and defeated the feeble attempts of his uncle to control him.

Darcy came in carelessly, revolving excuses for lateness; he was not by nature given to excuse, but he was not above a good ingenious one if it kept his aunt happy; he was not a bad-hearted boy.

But as soon as he had opened the back door, he

stiffened, listening.... He entered the room like a thunderbolt. 'What have you been doing to him?' he cried fiercely, and flung himself on the bed. He did not take long to satisfy himself that Jean was worse than he had ever seen him. 'Take her away,' he said briefly to his uncle, 'and get a doctor.'

That night was a nightmare. When Jean set out to be ill he was ill.

In their accustomed drawer two clean shirts remained undisturbed.

CHAPTER IV

REPUTATION OF JOHN DARCY

On these facts John Darcy's peace was shattered. It was with some indignation that he realized that he had not, as he had supposed, been relieved of responsibility for Darcy and Jean. The Stokes, however, were to be pitied. With Frank Harris impatient, and Jean prostrated, Darcy had seized the occasion to become unmanageable. He had refused to go to work unless his uncle promised that Jean should not be sent away. The prospect of losing his position appealed to him only as a weapon to use against his uncle. He was deaf to argument, anything else was out of the question; both in physique and in determination he was the superior, for William Stokes was a small, slight man, given to irresolution. He had compromised characteristically. Jean was not to be sent away without Darcy's knowledge, and a family council was to be called. It was difficult to see what good that could do. John Darcy more than suspected that the whole thing was an excuse to get him to coerce the boy. He almost refused to answer their appeal; yet, if the thought of a conflict was distasteful to him, to shirk it would be worse, to confess himself equally unable to handle...

Responsibility triumphed. Trouble was doubly invited. He agreed to attend the family council.

It was not an impressive gathering — John Darcy, inwardly cursing his folly in rushing into trouble, Frank Harris, solid, disgruntled, William Stokes watching him uneasily (he had been left as much as possible in igno-

rance of his future charge's intractability), Mrs. Stokes, nervously half-hypnotized by awe of her brother-in-law, Darcy, very white, signs of strain appearing about his mouth and nostrils. He was undisguisedly recalcitrant, defiant, obviously overstrung. He too had no doubt of the reason for his uncle's presence; they watched each other, for the first time openly antagonists. At the last moment fruitless efforts had been made to exclude Darcy. One felt that any conference would have had more chance of success given the absence of Mrs. Stokes. William Stokes would have gladly excluded Frank Harris. If he learned too much? These were not the elements of a helpful meeting.

The leading voice was generally conceded to John Darcy. He was seriously displeased with his position. The presence of Darcy was as unexpected as it was unwelcome to him. He was to be called upon to display his authority in front of these, very worthy, people, when it was all too probable that he would be publicly defied. He had expected to deal with Darcy after the formality of discussion with his elders. This might be only mismanagement but it had all the marks of a manœuvre. If he were to be publicly defied, he would be more closely involved than he had intended. He determined to act warily, to say as little as possible, and to play for privacy.

He said formally: 'I believe we are all well acquainted with the facts of the case; we understand the purpose for which we are here; there can be no need to waste time on much discussion.'

Three very disputable propositions, but they were agreed to meekly.

He turned to Darcy: 'Have you any excuse to offer — any apology?' He reminded himself irresistibly of a schoolmaster; at all costs, however, Darcy must be

deprived of any right to rank as a participant of the conference. Being there, he must be assumed to be there in the character of delinquent. Defiance could then be met by 'I will deal with you later' (and alone).

'I promised,' said Darcy instantly, 'I promised him that they should not take him away. I had to promise to make him quiet.' He met his uncle's eye with a glance as firm, 'Are you going to try to make me break my word — like the others?'

John Darcy hesitated. He had not expected that excuse. The boy had chosen his ground well. One might almost have suspected him of an eye for his opponent's weak spot. His hesitation was fatal.

William Stokes rushed in: 'You had no right to make a promise you knew you could not keep.'

'I didn't.' Darcy flashed back. His tone was flatly insulting.

'Darcy,' said his aunt plaintively, 'is that a nice way to speak to your uncle?'

There was a dreadful pause while it appeared possible that some one might laugh. Humiliated already by his inability to control a boy of fifteen, publicly insulted by him, made ridiculous by his wife, William Stokes very pardonably lost his temper. He ruined John Darcy's plan. The conference seemed wrecked, irretrievably, while Darcy and his uncle William went passionately over arguments evidently already well-worn, with Mrs. Stokes protesting on the outskirts, and Frank Harris breathing heavily, giving every evidence that it was only a matter of minutes before he joined the conflict. Over this distressing scene John Darcy presided in silent unabated dignity, disgust at being forced to participate in it very considerably mitigated by his own unexpected immunity. He watched the combatants keenly, noticing with some surprise that the boy's con-

cern about keeping his word was very genuine. He was desperate, miserable, unassisted. It would have been possible to pity him, if he had not been engaged in taking an advantage of his adversary by making him despise the company he was in, ashamed of his allies....

'I don't see what all this fuss is about,' Frank Harris broke into the mêlée, 'a promise to a child to keep him quiet! No one could take that seriously.'

'He trusts me. I will not deceive him,' Darcy flung at him fiercely.

'You won't, eh? What right have you to interfere?'

'Right! He's my brother!'

'You can support him, I suppose,' sarcastically.

'Give me the chance,' said Darcy quickly, 'that's what I want. That's all I ask. I can if you'll only give me the chance.'

'What's all this ——' Frank Harris began in amazement.

'We can't go over that nonsense again,' said William Stokes wearily.

They regained their well-trodden path; Darcy closed with him with unabated energy. 'It's not nonsense,' he cried hotly, 'I can get work at night and give you the money. It will be enough to keep him. And you have all my other wages, anyhow, and in a while I shall have more. What more do you want?'

'Night work,' William Stokes was sceptical; 'that's the first I've heard of it. How much will they pay you?'

'Fifteen shillings.'

'A week? That will pay his doctor's bills I suppose!'

'No — it was not I that made him ill either. And you can pay his funeral expenses if you send him away, his constitution will not stand ——'

'You little fool,' violently, 'haven't I told you to leave that lie alone?'

John Darcy received partial illumination; this was the fear behind that desperation. Groundless?... He would have spoken, but he was interrupted by Frank Harris.

Frank Harris was suffering from severe irritation; having brought himself to the point of offering charity to his wife's relations, it seemed to him monstrous that any one could object to it.

'Now, look here, my lad,' he said heatedly, 'you just stop trying to interfere. Run away and leave these things to be settled by those who are concerned ——'

'Concerned,' Darcy's chair went down with a crash, he was leaning across the table, 'I'll tell you who's concerned, and that's my brother! He belongs to me and no one... he... why, he'd not be here if it wasn't for me! He'd be dead like the others. You! you think you're concerned because you have a little money to spend on him, money, and as little trouble to yourself as possible. Very charitable! And that gives you a claim to him that no one will dispute, so you say I am not concerned. I — why, I have sneaked and lied to keep him alive, begged even, and you — you huge hill of flesh, you come here and say... It is you that have no right. No one has but me — he is not ——'

'Is it true,' John Darcy intervened, calmly — it was quite time to end the scene — 'has he any authority for saying it would be bad for the child's health to send him away?'

'True? That boy would invent anything, it's no use paying attention to him. If you start him on that he'll give you a detailed story of what the doctor said to him and what he said to the doctor, we've heard nothing else the whole week.'

'Ask him,' said Darcy quickly, 'don't take my word for it. Ask him. Let him tell you what he told me.'

'His address?'

Darcy gave it eagerly. This did not look like invention.

'Doctor?' said Frank Harris uneasily. 'Is he really ill?'

'You'll think so after he has had you up for three nights.' Darcy was almost genial.

'Why wasn't I told?' Frank Harris was appalled; previous references to doctor's bills and funeral expenses lent a sinister air to his reflections.

'I told you he had not been well, that he was delicate,' said William Stokes defensively.

'If it is a question of the child's health,' said John Darcy deliberately, 'I do not see how we can insist — I think we had better consult the doctor; we cannot act in ignorance.'

'I agree with you, sir,' said Frank Harris fervently.

'You saw the doctor?' asked John Darcy.

'Only for a few minutes,' said William Stokes, 'and next day when he came I was out.' For the first time he began to wonder if there had been anything in Darcy's story; it was queer to find him asking for investigation so insistently. True, he had done that all along, but not with any chance of success.

'He said,' remarked Mrs. Stokes, 'that another attack might be serious; but why should he have another attack? He didn't have one before ——'

'He can have another attack at any time if you try to take him away,' said Darcy gloomily.

'Attack,' said Frank Harris, with almost morbid interest, 'what sort of an attack?'

'Hysterical,' said Darcy promptly, 'and then his digestion ——'

Frank Harris softly communed with himself and profanity.

'Such a young man,' Mrs. Stokes complained, 'and so unsympathetic. Really I don't think he can be a very good doctor. He said that there was nothing that he could do to prevent another attack and very little to cure it.'

John Darcy considered. He was convinced that Darcy would never have sent him to the doctor if he had no cause to expect support from him. In any event, it was unlikely that Harris could be prevailed on to take the child now, or to keep the offer open for an unlimited time, on the chance of a recovery. On the other hand, the Stokes could not afford to do much...

'I can start work to-morrow night, Uncle William,' said Darcy briskly, an unsuccessful attempt at consolation. William Stokes shook his head, discouraged. Lying or not, it looked as if Darcy had ended Harris's first venture in charity.

'You will do nothing of the sort,' said John Darcy sternly, 'stick to your work until you can support yourself. Then you can talk about your brother. If you will give me some sort of estimate,' he added to William Stokes, 'I'll make you an allowance for the present.'

'That's very generous of you, sir,' Frank Harris in appreciation.

'Really,' said William Stokes, embarrassed, 'apart from the doctor's bill, it will cost so little to keep him that you must allow me to ——'

'We can discuss that later.'

The conference seemed to be upon the point of breaking up, an acknowledged success. It had been unconventional, it had followed no settled course, it had not accomplished its original purpose, yet they were all satisfied — Frank Harris to escape untold discomfort and who knew what expense, William Stokes

relieved of a threatening financial burden, John Darcy to have escaped, his dignity not even threatened, with only a small pecuniary loss as the price of playing King Solomon — all satisfied with the exception of Mrs. Stokes. She was still intent on their original programme. Her mind had been most carefully made up to the departure of Jean and the punishment of Darcy. It was comparatively easy to make up her mind for her, but to unmake it or to remake it to conform to one's own, once that had varied, was a lengthy and tedious performance. 'I'm sure,' she protested, 'that he would not have been nearly so naughty if Darcy had not encouraged him.'

They looked at one another in consternation; in the glow of gratified self-interest they had been about to overlook the conduct of Darcy. It was immediately apparent that it could not be overlooked. Originally abominable, his every word had been an aggravation: he had insulted his Uncle William; he had grossly insulted Frank Harris. Not only, however, had he escaped punishment by his elders assembled primarily for that purpose, his misbehaviour had been rewarded. He had gained exactly what he had set out to gain by it. This was little short of immoral. It could not be. Mere apology could not cover it; punishment in some form must be inflicted. Mrs. Stokes suggested, hopefully, that the original arrangement should be carried out: 'For,' she pointed out, 'he ought to be punished and if we give in to him it will look as if we were encouraging — I'm sure he doesn't deserve to be encouraged!'

'That,' said John Darcy patiently, 'would be punishing the child instead and that is impossible.'

'Yes, yes, of course, impossible,' said Frank Harris nervously. 'What the boy really needs is a good sound thrashing.' Though he was a moderately good-natured

man, 'huge hill of flesh' rankled. As an epithet it was palpably unjust; he was no more than well-fed.

It seemed to be felt that he had proposed the most nearly satisfactory solution of their difficulty. Darcy disappeared and returned with a stout cane which he offered first to his Uncle William, then to Frank Harris: 'It would hardly do,' with an attempt at jocularity, 'I'm the plaintiff, you know; one can't take the law into one's own hands.'

John Darcy became aware of an atmosphere of expectation; he was the centre of a circle; eyes oddly reminiscent of the 'attentive circular eyes' of Meredith's feline periphrasis waited on him. It was true that he had come to exert his authority over Darcy, idle to deny that his muscular strength had not been the least important argument in favour of that authority, with what purpose you came... Darcy offered him the cane. Decently they repaired to the next room.

John Darcy realized with acute discomfort that the thing had got out of hand. The only possible way to deal with the miserable conduct of Darcy had been to forget it. Now that they had thrown away all chance of that there was no satisfactory way out. The vain pursuit of consistency had led him into a situation from which all possibility of consistency had vanished. He was about to punish a boy who had been, if his conduct had been justified as they were tacitly assuming that it was justified, thoroughly in the right. Yet what was he to do? Not to punish him would be to leave the Stokes deprived of even fictional authority, to give the boy every reason to think that in future he could do as he pleased, obey no one; to teach him most effectively that for him there was no such thing as discipline. Ideas that were, as it was, only too evidently and fatally his already. If he had been the sort of boy — John Darcy

wished most heartily that he had been — the sort of boy who could be trusted to take no harm from a free admission by those in authority over him that he had been in the right while they had been wrong, if it had been possible to point out to him and to expect him to see how impossible his behaviour had been, even if, on this occasion, it had been necessary, if it had been possible to acknowledge the futility of the Stokes without substituting his own for their authority or denying all authority, if it had been possible to trust the boy to himself — but it would be criminally blind to deny that that was most unlikely. To turn the boy over to himself was, in all probability, to deliver him over to his own worst enemy. On the other hand, John Darcy was perfectly aware that to punish him while he was obviously in the right was most likely to drive him to sullen or open resentment, defiance, or despair. He had never had less sympathy for anything than for the 'No one understands me,' type and attitude, yet it was impossible to deny that there was some excuse for it here. He said hastily, 'I hope you understand why you are being punished.'

'Oh, yes,' said Darcy, with cheerful confidence.

John Darcy, prudently, did not take the risk of finding out what it was that his nephew understood. It seemed only too probable, from his readiness and cheerfulness, that he considered it the merest formality. The extraordinary quickness of his grasping at the opportunity suggested that he saw in it the best way of binding his uncle personally to the agreement, his only chance of dragging in that most influential of his relations as a guarantee. They all conspired to force his hand, on one thing only they were all agreed — to make use of him. This sort of thing was really becoming insupportable.

His gloomier intuitions had been justified. Here he was shut up ridiculously with the boy he had not been going to be responsible for, committed to the task of punishing him unjustly, going to give him a good, sound thrashing. His disgust at finding himself in this situation, the uneasy dislike inspired by his surroundings — the vaguely stuffy room half-lit by a whistling unmantled gas-jet, too full of what only courtesy could call furniture for the active business he had in hand — these were not mitigated by the sight of Darcy, calmly and most unnecessarily removing his coat and collar, loosening his shirt at the throat. An unpleasantly farcical flavour began to be attached to the business.

John Darcy waited in grimly resolute detachment, noticing mechanically that the boy was filling out, yet he was still thin rather than wiry. The whole thing was preposterous. *He* was to handle the son of John Winteringham in this appalling place. He should have known better than to have come within forty feet of either of them.

It was twenty-six years since Darcy, the Head of his House, had handled a cane with some power and no little skill. He had never expected to be called on again to display it. He was rusty, had lost the knack; the cane, an awful piece of rubbish, heavy with no cut in it, disconcerted him; above all the old conviction was lacking. He was, perhaps, too conscious of his advantage — after all, eighteen is better fitted to deal with fifteen... 'You're holding it wrong,' Darcy remarked warningly. 'You want to give it a twist, hit a bit harder if you like.'

'What the devil!' John Darcy's temper slipped; one does not look for expert criticism from a delinquent under correction.

Darcy pointed out, in rather a muffled voice, that

did not succeed in disguising the fact that he was amused, that they had to give Them a run for their money: 'Let them hear a few yells and so on. I can't raise the roof for nothing.'

John Darcy was impressed by a sense of the uselessness of expecting any great degree of sensitiveness from the son... 'I've no intention of trying to rival your father,' he said rashly, and reaped his reward in impertinence: 'Oh, you're good but out of practice. He didn't get much either... lately.'

John Darcy felt momentarily at a loss. No disciplinary purpose could be served, punishment became a farce indeed under this confident acceptance of himself as an accomplice. He had only one resource, he could still administer a good sound thrashing, though it might do no real good it could still be sound, and there was no doubt that he was able to recapture much of his original skill. Darcy gave tongue in histrionic crescendo, in a voice calculated to carry, with the comment in a lower tone, 'Much better...'

John Darcy found himself defeated by the absurdity of the whole affair. 'This is ridiculous,' he said. 'I am not going on with it. Get on your things and don't let me hear of you being in trouble again.'

'If I am I expect you'll hear of it,' said Darcy ruefully. He retrieved the cane and, before his uncle could put a stop to this manufacturing of circumstantial evidence, he broke it across his knee. 'That's what you get for buying cheap stuff,' he said serenely. 'You can't do much good with that sort of thing.' He lingered, hesitating, unwelcome, while his uncle chafed silently under the events of the evening which had ended by forcing him into a more or less amiably conspiratorial alliance with the boy he had set out to punish. Darcy evidently had something to say, found it hard to say,

and ultimately left it out altogether; when he spoke it was oddly, with the effect of ending and not of beginning his sentence... 'Thank you,' he said eventually, almost, for him, diffidently.

'No need,' replied John Darcy curtly.

'Because of Jean,' added Darcy simply. 'I — he's not like the others. He' — he turned away, abruptly, checked, swooping down suddenly on his coat; teeth set in his lip, he was feeling blindly for the handle of the door when it opened in his face. The light of the hall fell full upon him, betraying him pitilessly to three anxious people filling the doorway.

Accustomed to physical punishment only in theory, for William Stokes at his small private school had not been of a type either to give or receive blows, and Frank Harris, an only son, had been hawked about among educational faddists by a widowed mother, while Mrs. Stokes had hitherto been preserved by Providence from any dealings with children, they had waited, straining nervously for sounds from the next room, heard one wild outcry, followed by unexplained silence which became more and more ominous as the minutes lengthened. This unexpected, inexplicable silence became unbearable. Silently they consulted one another's looks, unanimously they decided to go and see What Had Happened. Thus prepared they encountered a melodramatic scene — Darcy, undeniably overcome, with bleeding lip, looking deceptively young and slight in his ruffled hair and untucked shirt, his uncle dark, grim, in his splendid height and strength, the broken cane between them.

Darcy's eyes travelled from their expressive faces to his uncle, thus suddenly and unwillingly invested with a reputation for brutality. He clutched desperately at his self-control, it evaded him, he sank into a chair and

laughed helplessly, with the tears running down his cheeks.

'But he's hysterical! I don't think,' said Mrs. Stokes doubtfully, 'that you ought to have made him hysterical.'

'Oh, God!' said Darcy, lyrically delirious. He buried his face in his coat.

'I say, you know,' said Frank Harris uncomfortably, 'we didn't really intend ——'

And

'Weren't you a little too — surely it wasn't necessary ——' said William Stokes in the same breath.

Their eyes absorbed the spectacle of defiant youth, head laid on the arm of the chair, broken, sobbing. They could not help being impressed. It was hopeless to attempt to disillusion them. John Darcy did not attempt it.

'I am afraid I have damaged your property,' he said coldly; picking up the cane, he restored it to its owner. The fragments were received almost with awe. 'I trust you will have no more trouble,' he added formally. Darcy, with an effort, pulled himself together; he rose to follow his uncle's lead. 'I insulted you,' he said gravely to Frank Harris, 'I was inaccurate. I beg your pardon. I was rude, Uncle William. I am very sorry.' He turned to John Darcy, 'Good night,' he said sedately. Composure shattered by the sight of that uncle's face, he fled.

'After all,' said William Stokes regretfully, 'force is the only argument to employ with a boy of that sort.'

John Darcy received his hat and stick and took his leave automatically, hardly noticing what he did. Even after four years it was an unpleasant shock to find in any face eyes so like — that expression, that familiar look, an absolutely characteristic mixture of laughter, understanding, and the devil. Useless to tell himself that the boy was her nephew — John Winteringham's son.

CHAPTER V

JOHN DARCY STRUGGLES AGAINST HIS FATE

At Caldersham everything was running smoothly. John Darcy found his nephews' tutor satisfactory to the point of removing them from his consideration altogether. With perfect confidence he left them to Eric Calton, who taught them Latin and cricket with unequal enthusiasm, for two of them showed signs of unexpected talent. Jim seemed likely to develop unusual power and brilliance as a bat, while nothing could prevent Charles's becoming an all-round dependable player. Tony, unspeakably bad at everything, spent most of his time chasing balls.

It is true that John Darcy was occasionally disturbed by misgivings. He felt that he had been a fool. He should never have allowed himself to be forced into continuing relations with the Stokes. It was not that he was any the less determined that these children should be provided for; it would have been easier, for him, from the beginning to have paid for the lot than to have spent his time arranging, debating (a most unaccustomed exertion), holding distastefully these people to responsibility that was in reality more theirs than his, assuming that it was impossible for them to disregard it when, in fact, they would have been only too glad to have been allowed to disregard it. It would have been far less trouble, less disagreeable, but it would have been unjustifiable, unbalanced, lacking in judgment. He could, he ought, to do no more. Every initiative had been his, every endeavour, every inconvenience. The Stokes had been supine throughout. They should have been shown

decisively that they could expect no more from him. Instead they had been actually encouraged to think of him as a source of money, authority, and advice. He felt that fresh folly or misbehaviour on Darcy's part would mean a fresh application to him. And he himself had provided the pretext, the allowance for Jean was an ever-open channel of communication.

Nevertheless his apprehensions grew fainter with each month of security, and he was able for long periods to dismiss from his mind all thought of children, his own, those he had acquired, and those he was determined to leave to his neighbour. With all the more force, therefore, did those apprehensions return at the sight of William Stokes' handwriting on a letter. This was nothing to do with the quarterly allowance; that had been paid and acknowledged. He picked it up with the chill certainty of finding Darcy within; folly or misdemeanour, which, he wondered grimly, was it this time? Neither, he decided as his eye devoured the brief sentences, yet likely to cost the boy dearer than anything his imagination had ever presented to an unwilling mind. For Darcy had been indiscreet enough to fall down six stairs with a heavy desk; naturally when they reached the foot of the stairs, the desk was on top of the boy. Foot crushed, leg broken in three places, injuries, serious injuries to the back... Good God, what had he been thinking of? Moving furniture, rearrangement of the office. John Darcy put down the letter, thoroughly upset.

Why must they come to him? He had every disposition to be generous, yet there must be a limit to every man's generosity and he might fairly plead that his own had been reached. The Stokes... they had shown up very badly in the whole business. One heard of the kindness of the poor for the poor. That might apply to

out and out poverty, but not evidently to insecure gentility. Hang it all, they were not indigent. What would they have done if there had been no one to appeal to? If they were poor enough in spirit to be unable to shoulder their fifth of the burden, let them go to the boy's employers for compensation. He referred to the letter, a rambling old-fashioned office, probably badly constructed, consisting of a fair-sized general office and a series of pigeon-holes for private use, the two connected by a short flight of steep narrow stairs. It was down these stairs that Darcy had chosen to fall in the process of transferring the desk from the upper to the lower office. Compensation, he reflected, not great certainly; he knew very little about it, he would have felt bound, he knew, if it had happened to any one in his employment. The whole business was unfortunate enough. But it *was* disgusting to feel that their first thought had been to fly to him for help — oh, not openly, not yet — that would come.

Then it occurred to him that the boy's brothers might be considered to have the right to be informed. He, himself, would have hesitated to write directly to a boy of fourteen on such a matter. The disturbance of his mind was such that he almost found himself drumming on the table with his fingers, from which he had always considered it a short step to sheer idiocy. He pulled himself together.

'Tell Mr. Calton that I want to see him.' After all why did he employ a tutor if it were not to save himself trouble? He finished his meal with but the remains of an appetite, although, riding early, he had come in hungry. What a fool he had been to get himself mixed up with people of that sort, writing letters out of a clear sky to deprive a man of his breakfast. Calton's appalled reception of his instructions, his obvious em-

barrassment at the idea of breaking the news, these were very soothing. Calton, he thought a trifle complacently, was still a very young man.

He drove to the station in very fair spirits. He had appointments in town, but he was not going near the Stokes; it was the only thing to do; no use raising expectations. He referred again to the letter. More than a week since the accident, they had taken their time to notify him!

He meant to dine in town and stay at the club. If there was one thing more than another that he hated, it was a sense of disturbance in the house. He was not without excuse; his reluctance to leave Caldersham insured that there should always be plenty of business waiting for him in town when he could bring himself to attend to it. And yet, towards the end of the afternoon he found himself with time on his hands; his appointments conducted with the usual dispatch, his utmost ingenuity could find no business to fit in, nothing that was not better left to to-morrow morning. He was not used to having time on his hands. The club did not attract him. The sight of so many of his fellows, even though they were doing and saying nothing, was repugnant to him. He was tempted, in spite of his better judgment, to go to Emery Street. It was quite possible that the Stokes were making, more or less, a fuss about nothing; they were unmistakably of the breed that cries wolf on the slightest pretext. It would be a relief to find that the possibility, at which William Stokes had more than hinted, that Darcy was to be crippled for life, was only one more manifestation of this faculty of theirs. It took him longer than he had anticipated to get there — one always wonders how these folk find such out-of-the-way places to live in — but it was a decided advantage, a good excuse to get away. Indeed it was no

small advantage to be late enough to find William Stokes at home. For one knew, instinctively, that there was little to be learned from Mrs. Stokes.

Mrs. Stokes was distracted, and with reason; with a trained nurse turning the house upside down and having to be waited on hand and foot — the general had left on the mere rumour of her arrival — the house full of doctors, strange foods to be prepared, to say nothing of the shock to her nerves. She had been entirely unprepared. It was all very thoughtless of Darcy.

William Stokes was depressed. He was a good-natured man and willing to help his wife's relations, but he was not rich and the prospect of being saddled indefinitely with a helpless invalid was not a consoling one. He was gloomy on the subject of compensation. Darcy had indulged in a piece of carelessness and one that was likely to last him for the rest of his life. Shifting furniture was no part of his work; out of light-hearted amiability he had volunteered to help the caretaker of the offices, and the accident had taken place after office hours. Moreover the desk, also, had been damaged in its descent of the stairs. If he raised the question of compensation Stokes was afraid that the firm would raise the question of the damage done to the desk. He had hitherto escaped the responsibility for that, he refused to pay for it, how could he be expected to pay for it?

Slightly sickened, John Darcy allowed himself to be shown upstairs. What could one say for human nature when a presumably intelligent, respectable man could appear to confound the relative importance of damaged furniture and —— He thought with some indignation that very little thought had been expended on the boy, very little sympathy wasted there — really one wondered if these people were fit... Too late he remem-

bered that he had not intended to see Darcy, what good could an interview do?

Interview, as it turned out, it could hardly be called. Darcy received him with complete indifference, with no sign of recognition; he allowed his eye to wander over his visitor casually without curiosity and then returned to his former state of impersonal abstraction. John Darcy turned to the nurse. 'Is he always like this?' he asked involuntarily.

'He'll sulk as long as you leave him alone, but just you let any one touch him. Language... I never heard anything like it. You should hear him go on to the doctor,' she was agreeably scandalized. 'I don't know where he gets it, most of it's new to me. Luckily the worst of it's foreign, at least it sounds the worst. He's a bad patient,' she remarked judicially. 'He'll do nothing but fight and swear and sulk whatever you choose to do for him. He's the worst patient I ever had in my life and I've had all sorts, including Chinamen. Though they're not what you might think.'

John Darcy was not interested in her reminiscences. He left the room and the house as soon as possible. He was experiencing a series of confused and painful sensations. The boy was undoubtedly very ill. It seemed that Stokes was unduly pessimistic in looking forward to having to support him indefinitely. And what were they doing for him? So far as he knew, in spite of Mrs. Stokes' houseful of doctors, they had had only one, a young man, unknown, obscure... How could he know that the boy would be properly looked after? One had an uneasy suspicion that the Stokes were not the sort of people to strain every nerve to give the boy a decent chance of recovery; they would do as little as possible in a fumbling and inadequate manner and ascribe the result, whatever it was, to fate. He had been a fool to

go; he had done nothing, he had had a most unpleasant experience, and he had only given himself one more thing to worry about. He regretted his whole connection with this family; reopening it had been a stupendous piece of folly; he was tempted to regard the whole thing as a warning against ill-advised philanthropy.

When he got back to the club he was sure of it. A telegram was waiting for him. Charles had disappeared.

His first feeling was one of bitter resentment. All he asked of Fate was to be left alone to develop his land and his theories uninterrupted; yet for the last eight months he had been continually harassed, annoyed and worried by a set of... The Stokes, incorrigibly incompetent, it was impossible to trust them to manage even their own affairs; Calton, who had nothing to do but look after those boys, impossible to trust any one to do his own work. He had saved himself little trouble by engaging him, though, at the time, when the rector had mentioned his curate's brother it had seemed almost a dispensation. It would have been better to go to a reputable agency. It simply showed that one had to take trouble in the beginning to save oneself trouble in the end. He returned to the telegram, noting sardonically the length of time that had elapsed between the last time Charles was seen and the time of the discovery of his absence. What a superbly efficient staff he employed! As he was on the way to the telephone (this would make him late for dinner — he was late enough as it was), he was met by 'Mr. Stokes on the telephone, sir.' Good Lord, what did the fellow want now!

Charles had arrived in Emery Street a quarter of an hour ago.

Here was a nice thing! For the boy to run away under the illusion that he would not be caught was bad enough; but to run away with the absolute certainty before him

of return and punishment was nothing less than deliberate defiance. The fact that this was the first evidence Charles had given of indocility merely made it so much worse, unnatural; it was a shock, all the ideas he had formed of his nephews seemed to be in danger of turning out to be illusory. With ominous calm he gave instructions for Charles to be retained, later he, himself, would take him back to Caldersham and there attend to him, in a purely disciplinary sense. William Stokes in answer was, as usual, indecisive and roundabout, but from his confused and embarrassed longueurs John Darcy impatiently collected the fact that Charles was not exactly unwelcome in Emery Street. Jean, without Darcy, was rapidly becoming impossible; it was felt that Charles might be useful, if they could only keep him for a short time...

'Oh, keep him, keep him as long as you like.' He cut through the rigmarole. What the devil was it to him what these people did as long as they left him alone? And with Charles's fate temporarily settled, without prejudice to future discipline, he retreated hastily to dress with a mind relieved and his irritation thereby considerably increased. His so-called nephews had a habit of taking up his time at the most inconvenient moment of the day and leaving him only about three-quarters of an hour to huddle on his things in. It was outrageous. Charles... there was little real doubt in his mind as to the proper way to deal with him. Defiance, from a boy of fourteen, a completely and unreasonably useless piece of defiance. Why should he go directly to the one place where he was sure of being returned... the one place. He retied his tie for the third time — in his haste he was mangling it — and wondered if he were beginning to lose his mind. He had forgotten that he had given the letter to Calton; Calton must have carried

out his instructions. It was impossible to escape the conviction that Charles's conduct had been entirely natural.

John Darcy was subject to occasional attacks of open-mindedness, in which he escaped from that circle of continual absorption in his own point of view that made life comfortable for most of his fellow-men, in which he was likely to find himself looking at affairs not solely as they affected himself, nor as they might be made to appear to another, but as if they were the affairs and the conduct of another. Apart from the slight feeling of superiority induced by this faculty, he did not enjoy it; it was in many ways a nuisance to him that he could not rely on himself always to consider himself justified or at least justifiable.

He was, thus, never entirely safe. The most ordinary circumstance was enough, on occasion, to bring it out. In this instance the entire naturalness of the conduct of Charles, reprehensible as it was in itself, acted by establishing a ground of normality from which it was possible to judge the varying degrees of folly and irrelevance by which it was surrounded. It disclosed an unpleasant amount of pettiness and selfishness — the common inability to rise to an emergency even slightly above the usual level. It struck him with almost unnecessary clarity that he had been treating a serious matter with childish inadequacy. The wreck of a life, however insignificant its possessor, deserves to be classed among those events by which men, in their universal claim to judge all things, may themselves be judged. And even in comparison, even compared to the Stokes, he could not find in his own conduct a contrast great enough to be comforting.

And so, having tied his tie to his satisfaction, he sat down in his shirt-sleeves to write a note to his London

doctor asking him to examine 'my nephew' and to call in whatever specialists he thought necessary. After all there was no reason why he should be harassed by the fear that the boy was not properly seen to.

And this, in the end, was the only satisfaction that accrued to him, for the specialist destroyed the slight hopes that young Doctor Fall allowed to linger. There was not even at present the hope of escape; the strength of the boy's constitution condemned him to life.

CHAPTER VI

ONE WEEK — DARCY LAUGHS

1

An excellent visual memory may be a misfortune if it insists on recalling what one had intended to forget. It was not the first time John Darcy had endured its discomforts, yet he had never been troubled by a more persistent or a more recurrent vision. And yet in itself it was nothing, nothing shocking or heart-rending, unless it were the contrast; the boy, although one had disliked him, had been splendidly vigorous, thoroughly alive. John Darcy was aware that if he had expected to wash his hands of the affair, with any comfort to himself, he should have done it before he saw — he should never have gone to see him, he should never have had any dealings with the Stokes, nor with the Winteringhams before them, nor — but it was no use going into that. He was quite determined that everything necessary should be done, and to ensure that it looked as if he would have to take charge and see it done. But it was one thing to make up his mind to it; it was quite another to find that the Stokes had come to the same conclusion. He was, indeed, actively annoyed by Mrs. Stokes' letter asking him — as usual — to come. Not a word of explanation; she sent for him as unconsideringly as if he had been — the mind refused to conceive what, on those lines, he might have been. People who telephoned one at the club and wrote this sort of thing. His opinion of the Stokes had been going down ever since he knew them; now, he felt, it was approaching zero.

It appeared that Darcy had been asking to see him.

And, naturally, they had wasted some days in letting him know. Unceremoniously he made his way upstairs; his manner Mrs. Stokes found so peculiar that she easily persuaded herself that she did not have to accompany him. He found Darcy alone, a circumstance aggravating Mrs. Stokes' misdemeanour. To an inexperienced eye he showed little improvement for five weeks and three doctors.

'You want to see me?' In his irritation he had not given a thought to what it might be that he wanted him for, but as he said the words he realized that it could be only one thing. If he had had any doubt, Darcy's opening would have shattered it. 'I'm sorry to bother you,' he said apologetically. 'But there was no one else. These people are stupid. They'd tell me lies... And you never get anything out of a doctor.'

They were in for it now. Best get the business over as quickly as possible. The easiest way for both of them lay in absolute formality. 'What do you want to know?' said John Darcy mechanically.

Darcy suggested that he would not be able to walk any more. His uncle agreed to it. 'No,' said Darcy thoughtfully, and went on to propound his theory that, with a back like this, one could neither sit nor stand. His uncle confirmed it hastily.

It was really a dreadful thing, thought Darcy hazily, watching him moving restlessly about the room, a dreadful thing to drag a person all the way into town to make him come and tell you this sort of thing, but you simply had to know some time or other. Still it was an awkward thing to have to do, no wonder he didn't like it. No one could. Almost as bad as having to tell the others — no, not as bad as that because he had really known it all along or at least — while they had had no idea. And it did not matter much anyhow except that

it was a relief to have anything settled. It would be a good thing not to be awake any more having to argue to himself why and why not... Four steps to the foot of the bed and six on the other side, that was because his legs were so long, but some one would have to say something soon. He wondered if it was too late to say: 'Yes, that was what I thought,' or whether, 'I'm sorry you had to bother —' or had he said that already? Really for all the good his head was lately you would have said that he had hurt that instead of his back; perhaps, he thought hopefully, he had hit it on the stairs or something on the way down.

'I blame myself,' said his uncle, as if he were talking to himself.

I blame myself! Darcy woke to an almost affectionate amusement. The idea of any one blaming himself in that household was refreshing, a novelty, original at any rate. But what had he had to do with it, after all? Still it was an opening. Darcy mentioned that it had been his own fault: 'I knew it was too heavy.' Too late he realized that the opening was not useful; it could lead nowhere. His uncle did not pursue the subject. Darcy meditated turning the conversation; should he ask him if he had had a good trip up? But then mightn't it be rather an insult to ask him about it when it had only been to come up and have you spoil his afternoon for him?

'Is there anything I can do for you?'

Darcy thought about that for a while. It might have been easier if his mind had been free to concentrate on it, but it was foolishly occupied in deciding that he rather approved of this uncle. He approved of his boots, his hands, and his tie, his voice, his air of decision, his known habit of effective action, and his abrupt way, stopping at the foot of the bed, of saying: 'Is there anything I can

do for you?' He tore his mind away from its unsolicited approval.

'No — unless,' it was an inspiration, 'you could get them to leave me alone for a bit; what I mean is — *not* my aunt.'

John Darcy was disturbed. To desire the absence of Mrs. Stokes seemed to him rational. He sympathized with the feeling that prompted it; but to leave him quite alone was impossible; at least one trusted that it was impossible. 'Where is your nurse?' It was easy to suspect that the Stokes had dismissed her as a measure of economy.

'Oh, she's out.'

'Out!' Do nurses have days out?

'She goes out on Saturdays now. Aunt Lavvy was here until you came...'

'Is there no one else?'

Darcy barely bit back the name of Charles. Charles, having been overlooked so far, had better remain in the dark; and yet, though he had not thought before of getting rid of Aunt Lavvy, now that he had thought of it he wanted it passionately. To such a pitch of childishness had illness brought him. It was mortifying especially when you thought of what it meant to Charles. Charles would catch it sooner or later, but that was no reason why it should be sooner... he always hated it so ... *He* never wanted to get it over. Darcy's thoughts caught up with him at last, he was appallingly slow lately, he was an idiot not to have seen his chance before. It was as clear as daylight that his uncle was not likely to refuse him anything to-day. It was taking an advantage, of course, but he consoled himself with the reflection that it was not on his own behalf. 'There's Charlot,' he said reflectively. He waited for the name to gather to itself all the necessary significance before he

said (perhaps it looked as if it was more of an effort that it absolutely needed to have been), 'I wanted to talk to you about that.'

'You are not to worry about it,' said John Darcy promptly.

Delightful. 'I wasn't — much.' That came out unexpectedly, but really, when he hadn't... however it seemed that it was impossible to spoil anything to-day. 'But you see it was really my fault. We had a sort of arrangement about how we could get to each other if we had to. And so I gave him half the money in case ——'

'What money?'

'The money for the furniture. Did you think I came away without selling it?' Darcy would have laughed if it had not been better not to. 'And so when he heard he came...'

His uncle said only: 'I suppose you could send him if you needed anything.' But Darcy found the tone satisfactory.

'He'd be lots more use than Aunt Lavvy in any case.'

'Very well, then... Have you everything you want?'

'Oh, yes.' It was quite true really; he had everything he wanted because he wanted nothing.

'And you understand that you are not to worry about — anything?'

Not dying, said Darcy's brain instantly, in answer to that peculiar emphasis; innocent, it added insultingly, for he had not even thought of it. 'Oh —' he said a trifle dizzily, 'no. Thank you,' he added to John Darcy's departing back, and six months of office training supplied the 'sir,' thus happily closing a fairly creditable performance.

After all, what was the use of worrying now about not dying when you had not worried about it, in any case.

And if there was anything that he was going to have plenty of later it was time; while now, in a moment, he would have Charles on his hands.

In the pressure of other matters he had pretty well forgotten Charlot. He resisted, but feebly, the familiar conviction that he had treated Charles badly; and, as usual when he thought of Charles, he was torn by a perplexity of contradictory feeling — despairing hilarity touched by regret and chequered by remorse. He thought of what it must have been like for Charles to run away, for his was not a temperament to do anything without anxiously counting the cost, and punishment meant more to him than to any of the others. Charles would not run away as he himself — or Jean — would have, because it was the natural thing, because he wanted to, or, as Jim might have, for a lark; but Charles must have run away, as he did everything else, conscientiously. Oh, God, to run away conscientiously! How can you laugh at him when you know it was for you, he told himself fiercely but, as usual, he could and he did and it hurt his back as he richly deserved for his black ingratitude.

'I say, how did you manage to get me off?' Charles was awed. 'Of course he never said anything exactly, but I knew you'd got me.'

'Oh, I said what I could think of, but if you ask me he meant to all along. He is not,' said Darcy didactically, 'what you think he is.' Safe to say it, things never were. And it annoyed him that Charles knew better than to dispute it, although he had never been guilty of an expressed opinion.

'Don't look at me like that,' Darcy added ungently. 'I suppose You think I'm going to die.' He took fresh breath to inform Charles that he was a fool. 'No one with any sense would think of a silly thing like that.'

Every one in the place, even Charles, and he innocent as an angel. It was really too much.

'I didn't want to think of it!' Charles was goaded, but all too evidently relieved. You could have bitten him for it. Of course it was not only silly and unreasonable but unfair as well to take it out on Charles because of being tired; but when had that made any difference? Charles had a gift for making you do things like that, things you never meant to do. There were too many people in the world anyway, and most of them in the family, with your brain going on thinking about them when all you wanted was to lie still and think of nothing for a change. Charles... he must have had a bad time with these stupid — as he was the only one interested they'd naturally tell him nothing, and that horrible child... He felt another inward stab of laughter, for Charles had always been about as pleased to handle Jean as if he had been a bomb, and he had run away to that. 'Has he been misbehaving?'

'Oh, not more than usual,' said Charles, all things considered, very nobly.

'Liar,' said Darcy, with a return of cheerfulness. 'Tell him that I am very angry, say that I said so. Tell him that unless he is better than bread I shall not see him to-morrow.'

'Oh, do you think you can? Will they let you?' Charles hesitated, ardent with gratitude, for that would put an end to the last of his troubles.

'I'll see what I can do... D'you mind me not talking, Charlot. I was not asleep last night....' No one could say that that was not the truth, and how could he help it if Charles would bustle about pulling down blinds. He had not contracted to go to sleep, he had not even said that he felt like it, and the one thing he would not do was to have a messy wet handkerchief on his head.

And in the end he was acquitted of any suspicion of false suggestion, because one of the things he had not yet learned to calculate was the measure of his own exhaustion.

2

John Darcy left Emery Street as usual a prey to feelings more disturbed than he cared to acknowledge. It was no longer possible to maintain that mood of efficient and artificially unemotional detachment so useful to those who deal in Cases of This Sort. He was forced to admit a sympathy too painful not to demand the relief of action. The boy was a damned plucky boy, it had become necessary to give him something.

Not the thankless gift of a bare existence, under circumstances rather better not dwelt on, but something personal and unnecessary and, if possible, expensive. He was watching the passing shop windows, wondering what possible — a bookshop; of course, invalids should read. He pulled up the cab and went in. Immediately he was confronted by the appalling difficulty of what to choose; to say, 'I want a book for a boy of fifteen,' would not help him much, this was no ordinary — and then he experienced an authentic flash of inspiration. French! The book must be in French. And then the difficulty — a French book for a boy of fifteen? A practical impossibility.

John Darcy was not a man who had any strong recollection of his youth and to him anything under twenty-one figured more or less as a child. The distinction between the ages of twelve and fifteen was very vague to him. With him a person's age remained what it was when last it was brought to his notice; his younger daughter had been nine for the last three years, and Darcy, probably, would continue fifteen until the

change was brought prominently forward... Jules Verne, of course. But they had Jules Verne only in translation. Yet it seemed impossible to waste an inspiration... Ah, of course! Corneille. Safe, moral, elevating, educational, impeccable on every count. Well, thank God for the Classics. He bought the Œuvres Complètes, three volumes not too heavy to hold, leather bound, coloured plates of the Comédie Française costume, and had them sent to Emery Street.

He left the shop much relieved and decided to walk to the club; he had several things to think over.

First, and not least disturbing, was the suspicion that the Stokes might economize by dismissing the nurse, and what was more probable? He had heard nothing about the financial situation from them as *yet*, but he knew that *that* was only a question of time, they would apply to him for help; and if it was a question of keeping the nurse, he knew that he would give it. What sort of care could one expect from Mrs. Stokes? And in that house — a miserable place, little air, less light, no sun, damp, not even a fireplace in the room; the boy would be better off in an institution. But for some reason his mind refused even to consider an institution; in any case it would be a waste of money on institutional fees, while with a competent nurse, he would be no trouble and little expense at Caldersham. At Caldersham? Certainly. He had committed himself to support Jean and he could hardly escape looking after Darcy; he had, as he should have expected from the beginning, all five of them on his hands and it would be a piece of pure folly to maintain them in different establishments. For an instant he contemplated substituting Jean for Darcy; but it would not do, the Stokes would not agree to it; the difference between a boy partly self-supporting and a child for whom everything must be done was too great.

And, too, one must remember the doctor's evidence, for naturally he had not left Darcy's statements unverified. Charles, now, was more of an age — it was conceivable that he should take Darcy's place. Conceivable but not worth considering; for the man who had allowed a boy of fifteen to be sent to work could not escape his share of the blame for the result, and he was not going to be responsible for another —— It was perfectly apparent that the Stokes were not fit to take charge of any one. What was more likely than that a boy left in their hands, totally without training, as they evidently left them, should go wrong and then they would simply call on him again. Going wrong was an accident only too likely to overtake any son of John Winteringham; and here he was, having assumed the responsibility for all of them. All he could do to guard himself against trouble in the future was to see that they all had sound training at present. And, having convinced himself that he was acting purely from self-interest, in no way influenced by sentiment, he sat down and wrote a letter to the Stokes.

The next evening John Darcy found a letter waiting for him, when he came down to dinner; he turned it over idly and wondered why Charles was writing to him. Inside it he found a torn sheet of paper with a pencilled scrawl:

I am sorry but I must see you. It is not to thank you; there is something I ought to have told you before.

De grâce,

DARCY WINTERINGHAM

Something odd had happened to the Winteringham; but the rest was, painfully, legible. He would go, perhaps, to-morrow afternoon — no, morning; he did not attach much importance to what Darcy might think he

had to tell him, frankly there did not seem to be anything that could possibly concern him, but there was no need to leave the boy worrying unnecessarily. He was in no condition to be kept waiting with even the most imaginary difficulties hanging over him. He had been left waiting once too often with something that no one could call either imaginary or trivial to keep him company.

John Darcy's arrival at nine o'clock that evening threw the Stokes household into a flutter; he bore their gratitude with patience and announced his intention of seeing Darcy. Naturally for him all rules were broken.

He found Darcy undisguisedly restless and excited; from his looks he might be feverish; he was undoubtedly more upset than he had been the other day. That perhaps was not so bad a symptom, it was a sign of life, at any rate. John Darcy was glad he had come; it looked as if he might be able to save the boy one bad night, at all events.

'Bring the chair,' said Darcy, without any other preliminary, indicating a spot about a foot from the head of his bed. The whole affair was to be treated as a tremendous confidence; his uncle was prepared to humour him, satisfied to notice small signs of relief and relaxation. Darcy was very evidently glad to see him. He took his seat, without making any question of it, and found himself immediately anchored by the arm. Darcy was taking no chances of his leaving before the end. His uncle watched the manœuvre with tolerant amusement. 'You should not have gone to the trouble of writing,' he said.

'I had to see you about Jean.' There was something in his straight glance at once terribly honest and very much distressed.

'But that is all right,' said his uncle, really surprised,

yet one might have guessed it would turn out to be that, possibly he *was* feverish. He said quietly and very distinctly, 'Didn't they tell you that he was to come down to Caldersham with you?'

'Yes,' said Darcy, in a curious hard breathless voice. 'That is what is *not* all right.'

His uncle stared at him. Was he raving?

'Listen,' said Darcy, speaking lower and very rapidly. 'Why do you bother about us? Because we are the children of your wife's sister, n'est-ce pas? Well. Then Jean has no claim on you. He is not her son.'

'Not your brother?' said his uncle, in amazement.

'Oh... my brother,' said Darcy, in a descending tone of disparagement.

'How... what...,' John Darcy had to confess himself bewildered. It was about the last thing he had expected to hear. And yet... John Winteringham... Could this be merely fever?

'When we went to France,' Darcy was evidently in great haste, fearing to be stopped before he had got his story out, 'it was not like where you found us. There was more money because it was my mother that had the money you sent us.' His uncle nodded, it had been a mistake to give Winteringham control of the money... 'And we had a bigger place and a servant.' He caught his breath, then went on with a rush: 'I do not know anything about her except that — that her name was Thérèse and Jean was her son.'

'How do you know? How old were you at the time?'

'Nine. But she stayed until I was twelve; and then one day she just went out and was gone and she left ——'

'How do you know — what makes you think he is your brother? You say she stayed?'

'It was my mother that said so; and she said, where

could she go (Thérèse), because she was so young and came from the country and couldn't go back for that reason because of being a peasant and Bretons very respectable. And she didn't know any one in Paris, and where would she go there? She said it was a moral responsibility. Talked,' said Darcy, with some distaste, 'about Hagar and Ishmael... And besides,' he added, suddenly practical, 'after all she did do almost all the work.'

'She said all this to you!' said John Darcy, in astonishment.

Darcy looked at him pityingly. 'To him. You see, our place was very small and you could hear... Oh, I listened, if you like... I,' a laugh caught him and left him looking shaken, 'I was a lot more interested than he was.'

'And you heard this when you were only nine?'

'Ten, I expect; you see our birthdays come pretty close together, and this must have been some time after, I suppose.'

'I thought that there were six of you,' said his uncle, watching him closely, although he could not say that he would ever have suspected Darcy of any form of distorted imagination.

'There were,' said Darcy briefly. 'Two died... And then, when Thérèse went, though she never liked him, she said he was a moral responsibility too.'

'Hers?' said John Darcy quickly.

'No, his.' Darcy was an unshakable witness, the more credible this time in so evidently correcting the pronoun simply for the sake of a literal accuracy of detail. He could not follow that train of thought. He understood nothing of that. 'But,' said Darcy frankly, '*he* never bothered...'

'So now he is yours,' said John Darcy absently. If it

were so, the child, truly, had no one naturally related and responsible for him but his brothers. And even if it were not, one could see, with the boy believing it, his position and his difficulty. If all had gone as it ought to have gone, the eldest brother would have been the right person in the right place. But now... it seemed a very circumstantial story. All this passed through his mind very rapidly, for Darcy, it seemed, spoke almost before he had got the words out of his mouth.

'*No!*' said Darcy, with a sort of shivering intensity. 'Damn you, he's my brother.'

John Darcy was startled for the second time that evening. The boy seemed to be capable of naturally right feeling. No doubt a brother ought not to be felt as being a responsibility. It was a good thing and a fortunate thing that he should be able to feel so much as he ought. It was not Darcy's unsuspected turn for right feeling that startled his uncle, however, it was the sensation that this boy might be capable of giving him a lesson in delicacy of feeling. Darcy's attitude was natural and in contrast with nature of that sort anything else... John Darcy could not help recalling without pleasure the feelings with which he had gone to Paris. He had never given a thought to the feelings of the objects — one might almost call them the victims — of his benevolence. They had not been presumed to have been more than a field for the exercise of his favorite virtue — responsibility.

'I ought to have told you before,' Darcy was saying restlessly. 'But in Paris he was too ill, I couldn't risk — and I never meant the Devonshire one to have him anyway. I was just going to tell him when you stopped me. Then I thought that would give me time and in a while I should be able to look after him myself — but I should have told you then. I did almost but... I would

always have too much self-confidence,' said Darcy coldly, impatience was the only sentiment he could afford to spare for himself... 'and now I am a responsibility myself.'

No doubt whatever that he could feel the bitter difference implied in the term as he applied it to himself, no doubt either that he sincerely felt that as far as he himself was concerned he had simply deserved it. John Darcy, silent, could feel the lack of what he too should have liked to have felt, a little of the common affection that would have made it easy for the one to give and the other to take; and feel too that he had deserved to have the difference — however unconsciously it was done — pointed out to him.

Darcy's fingers tightened on his uncle's arm and he said impetuously: 'What did you tell them for, and not me? Now you will have to explain to them and they will drag him through it all. He won't understand at first. Trust them not to let him forget though... Why did they have to know... Oh, my fault I know, I should have told you... And if you hadn't given them the hope of getting rid of me they'd have been much more reasonable — about the money I mean — after all I'll not be so very expensive to them and in time...'

'You are coming down to Caldersham,' said John Darcy quickly.

'Jean,' gravely, 'that makes a difference.'

It was undeniable.

'It makes a difference to me, too,' said Darcy. 'Do you think I'd leave him alone with them *and they knowing?*'

'The sensible thing,' said John Darcy, perturbed, 'would be to send him to school.'

'No, not that!... Oh,' with an effort, 'I know it's a sensible thing; but when he cries like that it does some-

thing to my head. I can't — not now... I expect I'll be better later and then he can go; and I'll be here when he comes back for the holidays.'

'Do you realize how short the holidays are? You would be alone for almost nine months of the year. Alone. With them. With nothing to occupy your time. At Caldersham you will have the other children, at least, and when you are better it might not be a bad idea to go on with your education.'

Darcy shook his head in silence and suffered consequences from the rash act, also in silence. His uncle found his hand grow heavy on his arm and he looked at him rather anxiously as he went on:

'It is always a foolish thing to make yourself a human sacrifice of that sort; you do not realize — it is impossible for any one to realize in advance what it would be.' Darcy only looked at him, as firm, as serious, as unwavering as he could have been himself. John Darcy saw that that argument was, as it usually is, useless here. 'You have no right,' he said, earnestly, 'to make such a sacrifice. You put a terrible load upon the child if you sacrifice yourself for him. Few people would accept a burden of that sort willingly, then what right have you to impose it on him without his knowledge? And even on the lowest grounds such a sacrifice is hardly ever worth having to the person concerned. No matter how grateful he may be, you will always remember it more often than he will, and the consciousness of your sacrifice will make you demand of him more than he possibly can give you in return.'

'It isn't a question of sacrifice,' said Darcy calmly. 'It's what I'd rather do. How can I ever hold it up against him when I know it was what I wanted to do?'

'And if I told you that it was a question of sacrifice — of your health, for one thing.'

'What there is of it!' Darcy was faintly satirical.

'It will make a difference — perhaps a great difference.'

Darcy said something inaudible, then with sudden energy, 'Oh, *my* life! You must think I'm attached to it!'

'I think you are rash, obstinate, and unreasonable,' replied his uncle warmly.

'I always was,' said Darcy, faintly amused.

John Darcy caught back his temper with an effort. He must put a stop to this. The boy was obviously exhausted, he had been talking with increasing difficulty. And yet it would be worse — impossible to leave the thing undecided. Darcy had undoubtedly been worrying himself about it all day. His uncle touched his hand and found it very cold, felt the pulse and frowned. What was he to do? What else could he do? It was impossible to blink or to overlook the interview he had had, months ago, with the doctor, he had a very clear recollection of the doctor's evidence, even to the words: 'I believe you will have this trouble at any time if you try to take him away, because it is chiefly nervous. It is caused by the child's passionate devotion to his brother and by his lack of physical strength — devotion, of course, in the sense of entire nervous dependence, quite selfish as is natural at his age. If he was stronger there would not be much risk to his health, superficially at any rate. But the only sure cure would be to make him independent of his brother. I doubt if you can do that. — Then you are against a separation at present? — I' — he had hesitated (he was quite a young man), and then — 'I should call it an unpardonable cruelty at any time.'

What was there to do? What use could there be in considering an academic question of responsibility, or

some ideal way of dealing with a thing when there was only one possible way of doing it?

'Promise me,' said Darcy, in short rushes of speech, 'that you will — give me — time — to explain to him before you tell them... I will not have that — telling... not that he'd believe her...'

'There is no need to tell him or them. He is coming to Caldersham with you.'

'No, no...' said Darcy hastily. 'I can't force you to ——' He added, quietly by an obvious exertion of will-power, 'Of course it is very good of you.'

'You are not in a position to say you will or will not do anything,' said his uncle, sternly. It was quite time to use his authority. 'You cannot possibly force me to do anything. Or to leave it undone. After all what have we got to depend on? The memory of a child of nine! How could we possibly think of acting on that, if we wanted to, even with the best will in the world? You must remember that this is a thing that will affect the whole of your brother's life.'

Darcy was silenced; there must be papers in France, he had the completest confidence that there are always papers — in France; but if his uncle wanted to arrange the truth so that he did not have to believe it — let him, let him... He was done, he could not go on. He felt sick and giddy, he wondered uneasily if he were going to faint; as always lately, he felt unwillingly the fascination of the near approach of that terrible luxury. It was no wonder the man disliked him — always making a scene. An irresistible remembrance of the comic heroines of his aunt's youthful literary choice, blushing, weeping, fainting, passed dizzily through his mind; no one could say that he was not as bad as they were, if not worse.

Under the circumstances he was not surprised to find

his uncle bending over him with a glass of water. 'Don't make me laugh,' he said faintly. 'It hurts my back.'

His uncle thought he was delirious.

3

Darcy was reading to Charles, had him to himself for the first time, by a species of management not so easy as some people might have thought it. He should not have been holding the book and he knew it. Corneille, of course. The books had managed to coincide pretty accurately in their arrival with Charles and Jean, the other day. There had been a great business about getting off the string, a hideous unending noise of stiff paper and a bother about what to do with it in the end. 'Put it on the floor,' said Darcy coldly, although he was perfectly aware that this was no real solution of the difficulty.

'I say, they're in French!' said Charles. The thing had been sensation enough without that. Darcy received it with an equal mind; things did not seem to him either likely or unlikely nowadays. It looked as if it was going to be necessary to let Charles show them to him. And his uncle's card falling out to cap everything! Charles was left to read it out loud in all the slow accent of stupefaction the occasion called for; he was unassisted in his astonishment, for it always required an unusually lively sense of duty in Darcy to make him join in any sort of chorus, much less one of that kind, while Jean could be counted on invariably to leave any one flat if he started to act as if the skies were falling. 'I say,' said Charles, at length, tearing himself from the paralyzing card, 'they have got funny pictures in them.'

Darcy had felt strongly that they were probably not funny in the least. His sense of duty was practically

non-existent lately. He knew that he was going to have to look at the books very shortly but, in reality, he did not at all feel that he was going to; the hand he put out was rather more in the nature of a warding off than anything else. The book wobbled ridiculously in his hand, and he was going to have to turn the pages somehow with his thumb. Under these circumstances it was an unfavorable if not a hostile eye he had to turn on a very French, very elegantly mourning Sophonisbe, with an urn. There was a sweep about her — if it was only her robe; there was an air about her — if you couldn't quite tell what it was. There was something about it all — if it was only that a person could mourn so elegantly. It was a perfect picture of somebody acting, the acting was there in the picture somehow, and all the real parts of it left out. You would not have thought any one could do it. It was not particularly funny in Charles's way, but it was exquisitely funny in Darcy's.

He had seemed to come awake slowly, walking with uncertain steps back to inhabit a more familiar self, as he said, 'Are there any more of them?' And Charles showed him the others indefatigably, while Jean, who had been very carefully deposited — by inches — on the bed, went to sleep without being told to out of sheer boredom and the general peace and comfort in his mind.

That, however, had been Monday and this was Saturday, and Darcy was reading to Charles. And Charles was impressed, but only too evidently not understanding what there was in it to arouse so much carefully hidden enthusiasm.

It was Nicomède, naturally. It might have been a good idea to have chosen something he liked less, but Darcy had never been good at that sort of prudent self-insurance. It had been a foregone conclusion that he was going to stick his heart on his sleeve again from the

moment that, lured by the plate of a neat-bearded, oddly petticoated expository Franco-Bithynian in sculptured armour, he had stumbled into — well, it was something he knew, set in magnificent oratory, heightened by verse of a driving energy, crystallized into a personality that was all impassioned reason, calm defiance, and ironic disdain — Nicomède, the most truly indomitable of the Cornélian race of heroes.

> ... Ce sont des sentiments que je ne puis trahir
> Je ne veux point de rois qui sachent obéir.

He stopped. 'Do you know,' he said, in a changed voice, 'd'you know what he's done? He's written that last line first and stuffed the other in to make the rhyme. I'll bet that's what he did; he does it all the time.' Outraged conviction in his voice. 'Listen to this': he ran rapidly through half a dozen couplets that might have been anything as far as Charles could see. 'Damn him,' concluded Darcy bitterly, and the book striking the foot of the bed with a thump slid from there to the floor.

'I say,' said Charles, 'you know that book's lent!' For some reason they agreed to consider their uncle's card a mark of personal ownership. Charles added with some evidence of caution, 'I suppose it's easier to write poetry like that.'

'It's not the way — not the right way to write it,' said Darcy fiercely. The pain in his back was exquisite, it had been an appalling mistake to throw the book... 'It's not that they were written last, but what the devil do they do at all?'

'Of course it's exciting and all that,' said Charles rather too carefully, 'but I don't quite see why you're so keen on it.'

Darcy reflected. 'Well, you see, Nicomède... nothing matters to him, he knows all about everything, and

nothing can make him afraid of it, no one can touch him because his mind's his own, it's made up and no one can alter it, they can only kill him and it's his mind that matters. They can't even make him respect them. When Flaminius threatened him with all the Roman power, did he curl up like his father? He told him that when he's king, if they threaten him, to prepare for war, fortify their towns, and raise an army: And if Flaminius commands it, we may find him another Lake Trasimène. Trasimène, you see, where Annibal defeated Flaminius's father. Killed him too, I think. And when his father threatens to turn him over to the Romans as a hostage, which, of course, would be jolly dangerous for him, *as* he knew:

> J'irai, j'irai, seigneur, vous le voulez ainsi
> Et j'y serai plus roi que vous n'êtes ici.

'Oh, curse,' he added gloomily. 'He's spoilt that one too.'

'Yes,' said Charles doubtfully, 'but was it really sensible? I mean to get up and defy any one and every one; it's not useful — always. It was brave, of course, awfully brave...' pondering an obscure thought. 'You know,' he produced finally, 'you are rather like him really. I suppose that's why you like it.'

Darcy said, a trifle bitterly, that Nicomède had done things.

'I think you'll do things too,' said Charles slowly. It was a fixed article of faith with him.

'I was going to, of course, being the head of the family. But now — perhaps it's just as well, you've more common sense than I ever had. Perhaps you're right — not much use for Nicomède nowadays.'

Charles found himself standing beside the bed. Why had he been so simple as to believe that Darcy would

recover... He clutched the foot of the bed and said stiffly: 'What on earth do you mean?'

'They say I shall not walk again,' said Darcy quietly.

He had not thought of that, not thought of it at all; either you died or you got well... never imagined... never felt the least possibility...

Darcy was saying, '... Rotten hard luck for you... have to take all the responsibility. You'll be better than I would have been probably.' He heard only a word or two... 'Head of the family...' What had that to do with it?

In an interval Darcy remarked cheerfully, 'You know I shall be quite glad not to have to go back to work... C'était tellement ennuyant... you've no idea...'

Charles abandoned the foot of the bed. He stood over his brother, his fists clenched nervously, stammering, furious: 'You — you've no right to talk to me as if I was a baby.' 'You've no idea,' said Darcy clearly and firmly, 'no idea at all how much I hated it there. Going about saying "Yes, sir, most certainly, sir, directly," "At your convenience, sir." As if you were in church,' he added in tones corrosive with scorn. Charles's imagination refused to perceive Darcy making use of either of these expressions or of this attitude. 'And mind you,' said Darcy more calmly, 'it's not as if it was to make the family fortune. No one could — there. The fact is I was a fool. I should never have stayed if I hadn't thought that I could get along without having to be educated, but it's not a clerk that makes a fortune with or without it. I know that all right. It's a man with a trade, a master workman, a man that can work up through factories, it's not a little clerk in a little office. If you have ideas you're a nuisance, if you're keen you're a busybody, and what's more, bad form, and it's some one's place to step on you. It's not a

good place to begin from — you ought to be higher up or lower down. That's where you come in; you have more common sense; you'll have more education ——'

'What have I got to do with it?' said Charles, impatient.

'Don't you see that we can't *always* depend on my uncle? My God, there are five of us! He's very generous, but how can we let him — It would have been easier if there had been both of us — you and I — we could have done it together — looked after the others, I mean, and we needn't have asked so much from him, or for so long. But I was a fool, I threw my chances away because I had not the sense to refuse to do what I knew I had no right not to refuse to do, and so it's left for you, alone. I'm sorry... And not only that,' he added forcibly, 'but I shall be on your back as well as the others. D'you call that talking to you as if you were a baby?'

'I'll do what I can, of course,' said Charles slowly, and, feeling rather gone in the knees, he sat down heavily on the side of the bed.

Well, why don't you yell and faint if you want to, said Darcy to himself, not a little sardonically, but by the mercy of heaven nothing came of it. Out of the mist he discovered himself to be saying in a tolerably ordinary tone: 'I might at least have had the decency to refrain from making myself a burden...'

'Don't.' Charles was staring at a carpet whose pattern had gone wrong, where the colours were becoming queerly mixed. 'If it had only been any one else,' he said, helplessly. It tailed off into a useless unhandy silence, very difficult to make anything of. Charles, intent on the spectacle of his strange anastomosing colours, did not feel himself equal to making anything

of it, he had all he could do to keep them as straight as they were, which was not very.

Darcy said reflectively, 'Tu me soigneras bien, toutefois, Charlot.' It was a quiet, almost impersonal statement. This was quite simply a relapse into childhood, when Darcy's one idea in times of stress had been to let you go and do something for him. It was never really done to suit him, and the sight of any one else doing his things had always rather bothered him, but he never let either memory or experience stand in his way. In the face of all that was likely and disastrous, as soon as any one was in trouble it was always, 'I say, do come along and do this for me.' Charles flung out a hand, his right as it happened, clumsily, a little ashamed, a few seconds later he could feel Darcy's move slightly in response, a sickening perceptible slowness as if even that minute hesitating action was a dreadful effort for him. To *him*. He had always been almost too quick to follow. It was with great misery and a totally inexplicable feeling of comfort that Charles could feel his brother's thumb and that extraordinarily long forefinger making a cold circle around his wrist.

'Will they let me stay?' he said, without hope.

'I'm an ass,' said Darcy quickly. 'I should have told you. *He's* to take us down to Caldersham as soon as I can go, Jean too, which is jolly decent of him. Said I'd better go on with my education... Nice of him to say, "go on." I should have said, "begin." It's the observance of that sort of distinction that marks the true English gentleman. Ask Aunt Lavvy!... Tell me about Caldersham, you know your letters aren't much on description. All right, wasn't it?'

'It might have been. If you'd been there ——' This, from Charles, was a most sentimental declaration.

Darcy said calmly: 'I've missed you, rather; the

others too, of course, but they're younger. By the way, have you written to them at all?'

'Once, when I got here, and then, last Sunday ——'

'Tell them much?'

'Not — much.'

'I'll write later then — oh, yes, I can, in pencil. Tell me about the place.'

Charles began hastily. He had very little idea of what he was saying. Darcy was scarcely listening. The rather lame and random account of what neither of them was particularly interested in at the moment prevented a return of that silence that was the last thing either wanted, while it left each of them more or less to himself. Charles was suffering acutely. His earlier anxiety having been completely allayed and his peace of mind restored, his lack of further suspicion had betrayed him cruelly. In addition he was not without a familiar terror of what Darcy might not take it into his head to say. Charles, possessing strong emotions, feared them, feared above all things to show them. Darcy, for as long as he could remember, had been his chief difficulty, Darcy, ordering him about calmly, filling his imagination, and being, for good measure, incomprehensible. And this was not the worst, for Darcy was thoroughly capable of saying anything, though with a general preference for the truth, always, for Charles, an awkward thing. Almost any one has some things that — as for Charles he would have died first on many different occasions, but Darcy, as far as Charles could see, had nothing. No reticences decent or otherwise. Darcy's dealings with Jean, who was both emotional and affectionate, were regarded by his brother with all the fascination of horror. He had no idea that Darcy was fully aware of it, nor of the intricate and contradictory state that knowledge always induced in him. He under-

stood Charles's feelings, he wanted to respect them, but he could not help finding them funny — worse, comic — he laughed, rather, and loathed himself for doing it. And he was careful as a cat; if he had only known it, most of Charles's terror was unfounded, unnecessary... At the same time he could not be sorry to know that he had been missed, for Darcy had another quality that was even more dangerous — detachment, a habit of self-dependence. Charles knew always that Darcy was infinitely more necessary to him than he to Darcy. He knew that Darcy might talk about 'doing it together,' but it was unlikely that he could have stuck it out when it came to actually sharing it with any one.

Darcy was experiencing an equally unnerving reaction. During the week his world had been gradually repeopled — Jean — his uncle — Charles — and now the others: It was a racking agony. They closed in on him bringing with them a reality that had no place for him now. He hated them; he wanted to thrust them away. It was useless, like trying to hold the dark apart with your hands. A nightmare closing in upon him, that morning it had taken possession of him. He had slept badly, that is to say, worse than usual even, and waking at the usual hour, he thought of them languidly and with distaste; suddenly he was flooded with the horrible conviction that they would pity him, secretly, perhaps even openly. He had not thought of that, he could not think of it, it was unbearable, it was not possible to bear it. It was inevitable, he could do nothing. It was the worst thing of all. And he must tell Charles; tell him to-day while the nurse was out.

He had spent the rest of the day waiting to get Charles alone. He realized that he was énervé and tried to take it out with Nicomède and it had not worked. He was

clumsy with Charles, his one idea to tell him in such a way that he could not waste pity on him — in secret of course — he was not yet mad enough to imagine that Charles could ever express it. And what an injustice it had been after all. To Charles it had been a personal calamity. That was Charles...

Darcy remembered, almost sleepily, a time when he was twelve. His father being drunk — soûl comme un polonais — and Darcy himself intraitable, as he usually was, there was more than the usual trouble. The end was that his father had knocked him halfway across the room — couldn't have done it even then if he hadn't been drunk — and left, feeling, presumably, better. Charles, arriving for his share of the trouble — a good second he had always been — had found him on the floor pretty nearly unconscious, a lovely sight, for he had cut his head on — what was it? Anyhow the mark was still there, would be always. Murder, most foul, unnatural and bloody murder, he reflected with a dreamy satisfaction, was what it must have looked at first sight; no wonder Charles was upset. He was helpless and incoherent with grief and fury. Darcy had had to come back to a wavering and uncertain world to soothe, restrain, and console the other for his own misfortunes. He began to laugh. 'Mon Dieu, Charles!' he said, with appalling distinctness, 'que je t'adore!'

Luckily there was no one to hear it.

'Would you like to live in the country, enfant?'

'No,' said Jean promptly.

Darcy chuckled, 'Oh, not without me.'

'Isn't there any more work?'

'No. I'm going to be lazy from now on to the end of the world... a man of leisure. All I have to do is to sit still and let you all wait on me.'

Jean pondered. 'You to be there always? Not going away and leaving me?'

'No, never.'

'C'est bien,' Jean decided. 'I will go. Darcy, tell me a new one, the one you told me the other day.'

'You little beast, you selfish little brute!' said Charles violently.

Jean sat up in bed, hugging his knees, he rested his chin on them. He asked no questions; it would not be necessary; nothing could have stopped Charles; he needed no encouragement. Jean did not look at him; he hardly ever looked at any one. It was not that he took the trouble to avoid it, it was no trouble.

'"I will go!"' Charles was heavily sarcastic. 'Now isn't that nice of you! You... all you can think of is yourself. As long as you've got him where he can't get away from you, what do you care? What do you care whether he ——' Jean dug his chin into the hollow between his knees and waited. In a few minutes Charles was going to tell him what he wanted to know... 'whether he's ill or not... or if he never gets better.' Jean raised his eyes and inspected Charles's face, calmly. Charles was infuriated by his impassive demeanour. He had had enough, definitely enough, of Jean, in the last few weeks. Jean had found his company only slightly more tolerable than that of total strangers and let him know it. 'You little idiot,' he said bitterly. 'Don't you see that he'll be a — that he won't ever be able to walk? What do you care, as long as he can't get rid of you, whether he's in frightful pain ——'

Jean raised his head, sharply. 'But that is all over,' he said crossly.

'No it is not.' Charles banged the door after him.

Jean laid his head on his knees very quietly. He had

wanted to know if it hurt and it did. This was what he had feared. This was the worst thing that had ever happened to him. He was not crying, what would be the good? He could cry when it would be useful to him but — and no one could say that it had not been useful ... He felt sick; but he was not going to be ill. He could not because Darcy... If he had wanted him to know Darcy would have told him.

In all the weeks that followed it was the complete unconsciousness of Jean that Darcy found most consoling.

CHAPTER VII

MANY MINDS

1

DARCY was coming down. Tony went and told the horses. Of the 'others' Tony had the most reason to regret the old life, when no one had asked him to do so many hard things, and Darcy, who had never called him stupid. Darcy had not even been patient with him.

Tony learnt to watch all the others, even Anne, a girl to his shame, doing all sorts of impossible things, with a deep silent misery. He had not known before, but now he was never to be allowed to forget that he was clumsy and slow and stupid. And you never knew when some one else might not come along with a new thing that he would not be able to do. Tony did not complain of life or Fate or whatever it was, he did not even know that he was entitled to complain, what was the good? Things happened; he did not conceive of their being to be considered either fair or unfair; they were. He became quieter, slower, and more clumsy, and every moment that he could get to himself he spent in the stables adoring the horses. The horses tolerated him, they even seemed to approve of him, for he was tactful with carrots and sugar when he could get hold of them.

His cousin George, surprisingly enough, approved of him also. George, aged six, possessed of a digestion easily upset, was supposed to be delicate and alternately spoiled and bribed or bullied by his nurse in consequence. Very much the youngest, not very active, looked down on by a vigorous elder sister, he spent

much of his time alone; his chief ambition — to be continuously entertained — had never been anywhere near realization. His appetite for stories was insatiable. With Bess at school, Anne unavailable, and his nurse exceedingly coy of the printed page, Tony was his obvious and perfectly willing victim. Reading, with him a slow and painful process, was a failure; but George was never tired of hearing all that he could remember of Darcy's stories, his curious French-English both in accent and phrase lending charm to a narrative only too apt to be bald unless he was able to recollect Darcy's exact words, for Tony had not the slightest gift of expression.

'He wrote the letter. Himself,' said Tony to the Queen of Sheba.

2

George would never have been by nature either unsociable or solitary, but circumstance had gone far to make him so. He had always led a dull life and an isolated one, until all life was electrified by this sudden invasion of marvellous cousins.

They came very suddenly, the first ones, in the night without your knowing anything about it, and, next morning, there they were having breakfast quite as if they had come in an ordinary way, and Jim quarrelling with Anne because he had not left enough jam, as if they were not wrapped in clouds of mystery, talking so that often people could not understand them, having different names at first. George wished he could have a different name too. He did not at once at all believe that they had really happened. And they said 'these are your cousins' as if you had ever known that you had any! And they just looked at George and saw that he did not matter, so Jim went on quarrelling with Anne

and he was glad to be left alone to look at them and at nurse looking at them. And you could tell by the way she looked that they were mysterious. George saw it all going on and did not eat his breakfast.

It was Jim that he always looked at most. He was the centre and most important focus of that first dazzling visitation; not Charles, though he was very big and incredibly old, as old as Bess who was at School, and assured, but Jim, who was like — when you saw him first you said, 'That is what it is then — like That' — for Jim was beautiful. George had not really thought people were, outside of stories. And, too, it was Jim who could run farther if not so fast as Anne, climb at least as high, and even, one very rainy day, tempted by her to wrestle, had her, shoulders down, on the floor inside of two minutes, only to be kicked off excitingly by Charles who had started almost as soon as they had, with remarks that it was interesting not to be able to understand. Jim, not being the least subdued by such treatment, only rolled over trying his best to take Charles's legs from under him, with Charles staggering but unshaken even by Anne's rising furiously to denounce him for interfering. Even though Anne was angry in the way that always made you feel cold inside your mouth (George knew all too well what that meant). It was all very thrilling and it made you see how little there had been in your life before they came, but it might have been frightening if it had not been for Tony, looking through his fingers and saying: 'They have a good time, Georges,' in the funny soft way he always said it, not even moving from the way he always lay on the floor on his front with his chin on his hands, his fingers in his eyes, as they always were, and saying, 'Darcy would like that,' as he always did.

'Would he *like* it, Ontan?' (He had said: 'Call me

that' — although it was not quite like that perhaps — 'because it is my name and I like it.')

'He'd like stopping it. Darcy would stop it,' said Tony removing a hand to snap his fingers, 'like that!'

'*Could* he?' said George, with a gasp. Imagine any one stopping Anne — wouldn't it be a wonderful thing to see, if you *could* imagine it.

'Darcy could stop anything,' said Tony confidently.

'Not my Father.' George was afraid of his father, deadly afraid of him, more afraid of him even walking about and saying nothing, as he usually did, than of Anne when she was angry.

'Chut,' said Tony, under his breath. 'Don't tell, but he did — that. He did not say that he did but I know that it must have been him because there was no one else. He says he is a man who sees reason easily — your father.'

George was stupefied.

He did not see them much ordinarily except at meals, they having lessons and games and other dignities and playing otherwise with Anne. Even at meals they were miles removed. Charles never spoke to you, naturally, nor Jim, except to say sometimes: 'Why do you always *look* at me!' To which there did not seem to be any very good answer, so George said nothing, as usual, and that was all, except the time that Tony said: 'A person has to look somewhere, Jacques, he has to do something with his eyes.' And Jim was cross with him about being called Jacques.

For Tony, though not really as wonderful as the others, was nice, and though he too had the things they had to do, he talked to George and he tried to show him how to talk their way. He had always plenty of time and always let you come and see what he was doing. You could see that he was not quite as important

as the others or would he have bothered about that? And yet it was Tony that went, that time, and talked to Father when he came back from London. It was Jim who said: 'He'll be furious with all this happening. Charles and all...' (a miraculous thing that had happened the day before but George had missed most of it) 'I shouldn't go. Charles'll write.' And Tony, saying, unreasonably, 'What can he do to me?' went and came back, when they said, 'Was he cross?' saying with straight lips, 'No, he was very — kind.'

3

Jim found that he had never realized how long eight months could be nor what a difference they could make until he had to go into that room and meet an almost total stranger that was yet, unendurably, his brother Darcy, lost eight months ago on the way from France. He knew that he had been ill, he knew that he could not walk, but how could he know that he would look like — still and white, so — long under the blankets, and, horribly, older? How could this be Darcy, answering in an even patient voice that was not, never had been his, the hasty jumble all about nothing offered to cover up the dreadful discovery that there was nothing to say? There *was* nothing to *talk* to him about. Darcy was, naturally but dreadfully, ignorant of everything that had been their daily life for months, the very names of their games and the places they played in meant nothing to him, he still spoke French! And about what *he* had been doing no one could be expected to talk. It was all very well for Tony. All he had to do was to stick his head down on the pillow — 'Darcy, I'm so glad you're back!' — and hang over the foot of the bed, looking — quite openly. But then no one expected him to have any tact or to behave in any required manner — going

back to hug him again (if it could be called that when you could hardly allow yourself to touch him), as if he did not know that things of that sort were not done by people of his age in this country! It was not for want of telling. And Darcy — Darcy did not seem to know it either.

They had said, 'Only for ten minutes,' but it seemed more like ten hours.

4

Anne bringing a carrot, forgotten that morning, to Pasiphæ, was surprised to find the stall occupied by more than Pasiphæ. It did not take her long to recognize Tony's boots. Ordinarily she would have gone away without a word as etiquette demanded, but ——

'I say, that's dangerous, you might get stepped on — badly.'

'D'you think I care!' It did not sound like Tony.

She went away, rather thoughtful, and found a bucket. And if he had not been so tied up in himself he need not have been wet except on his head, but if you couldn't find it... Not that he was not wet enough already without that, though not on his back, naturally.

Tony was sent to bed without tea for ruining a nice clean shirt, but he was very decent about it and when she found a way in with what she had been able not to eat, he admitted that she had acted for the best. It was not as if Pasiphæ was a quiet person, she was a chestnut with a chestnut temper. No one could help liking Tony.

'Everybody's in bed, to-day,' Anne informed him cheerfully, 'your little brother and all.'

Tony sat up to worry. 'I ought to have been there, he'll do more for me than he will for Charles. D-Darcy's the only one though that can do anything really ——'

'What does he think he is?' demanded Anne, outraged.

5

They were doing, Bess thought, very well, or rather they would have done if it had not been for Anne. It is, indeed, difficult enough to remember to say all the proper things under circumstances so rather fearsomely outside one's experience without any one setting themselves out to be a handicap. And so she was suitable a little breathlessly and always with the uneasy consciousness of Anne behind her lowering darkly over the whole affair. And having the requisite heavy dark eyebrows she did that very well. She had at first refused to come. And Bess rather wished that it had not seemed so necessary that she should come too, the first time; at the time one felt that it would have been outrageous for her to get out of it while others did everything (as usual!); still, if you hadn't insisted you would have been a lot more comfortable now!

And Darcy, though in reply he was helpful enough with what ought to be said, was looking only at Anne, so again and as rapidly as possible without indecent haste Bess was so glad to see him, hoped that he was comfortable, that he had everything he wanted, and that he would like it here, and went, trying to take Anne with her.

But Anne, perversely, stayed.

Anne sauntered down to the foot of the bed and scrutinized its occupant with an intentness that Bess would have found ominous. Darcy returned her gaze out of the dead sea of ache and weariness that was beginning to seem habitual and interminable, with the first faint stirring of interest and amusement. This, at any rate, was not going to bore him with purely con-

ventional hopes, impossible of achievement, of his 'being comfortable.'

'I slapped your young brother this morning,' said Anne, abruptly, 'for not eating his breakfast.'

'And did he,' said Darcy, with beautiful gravity, 'eat it *after* you slapped him?'

'He did.'

'Pas possible!' The lengthened syllables of incredulity were simply a civil acknowledgment of admiration. Why should he doubt that she had performed a miracle when it was so inestimably for his own benefit? If any one beside himself could control Jean an oppressive load was removed from his mind, his tired mind that snatched so gratefully its first chance to believe in miracles.

'It is,' said Anne, 'quite possible.' (She suppressed the fact that her action had been accompanied by the well-chosen and excellently effective words, 'D'you want them to go bothering your brother about you — now?') 'Ask him,' she said, defiantly, 'if you don't believe me. And what's more if he does it again *I* shall do it again!'

The door shut behind her, cutting off Darcy's, apparently incongruous, 'Thank you...'

Bess was waiting in the hall.

'I suppose you've been saying something awful...

'I should think you might remember that it's our duty to do what we can for him and make him feel at home...

'After all it's as much your responsibility as mine...'

'I hate cripples,' said Anne, vehemently and calamitously.

6

The news of John Darcy's latest eccentricity had run through the neighbourhood with all the spirit and fire of

the alarm for the Spanish Armada. Unluckily it was not so definite, so well-authenticated or so easily accessible. The Sources were few and overworked. The Village, of course, could, and did, tell everything, but one can hardly gossip — one *can* just hear, from an old family servant (who, if quoted, has been in the family for generations), who has just heard from friends, relatives, and tradesmen; but the activity, being confined to listening without the joys of discussion, unless one just passed it on in a convenient haze of attribution, could hardly be considered perfectly satisfactory. So a providential and fortunate elder brother was much in demand; every woman who knew him hung on his words and even the heads of families quoted him. He, even, somewhat to his own eclipse, was able on occasion to produce what he described as the fons et origo of his own information; and although Young Calton was naturally much more careful and very much less interesting than he had evidently been in brotherly confidence, the feat was very highly considered. A discreetly radiating confidential few were privileged to share the Reverend Arthur Calton's own personal experience.

'Curious how foreigners, for the boy's very little more, inevitably pick up slang, argot, anything but the English language. Though this youngster, possibly, hasn't had the best opportunities. I don't know whether you've noticed that if foreigners do acquire an English accent it is invariably one of the wrong kind?... No, his accent's very passable, I was thinking more of slang... Oh, naturally, I go up to inflict myself and the Scriptures on the children once or twice a week... Oh, absolutely neglected, of course, they know nothing... Sixteen, I believe, and only a vague remembrance of Noah's Ark and David and Goliath... Yes, it is rather novel. I imagine they find me quite inexplicable... Slang?... Oh, yes, you

must let me tell you that story "on" myself. You see it seemed that one must take some responsibility, though one was naturally reluctant to "jaw" the boy. One decided to say a word or two to him about what, I suppose, would be popularly described as his "affliction" and — er — urge him, vulgarly speaking, "to cast his burden on the Lord." I believe he had no idea, at first, what I was driving at, such a possibility probably quite outside his experience, but as soon as he "caught on" he blurted out: "Why should I? He had nothing to do with it. I did it myself. I bought it, I can pay for it." Yes, one wonders where they pick it up... What else? Oh, very little. In fact I was distinctly feeble, the young rascal disarmed me quite, went to sleep in the midst of my reply, in such a deliberately unconvincing manner that I was forced to come away...' And to the inmost circle he added: 'Very reprehensible, of course, still one doesn't find so many people anxious to assume the responsibility for their own mistakes; I am afraid I have always found them too ready to lay the blame anywhere else... Yes, for a change, one must confess — very refreshing.'

Arthur Calton was known to be broad and, though the neighborhood was not rich in men, he was generally considered a man's man; even with girls of a markedly robust temperament he quite got over the curse of being a curate.

7.

The Prestwich source was not as interesting nor as overflowing with first-hand information, but it flowed further and, possibly, on a higher level. Lady Prestwich was heard (with unwonted attention):

'Oh, yes, very much changed, I should never have known him. I never understand how it is that attractive

children grow up so — oh, not really, only rather ordinary. Terribly thin. I know thin boys can be attractive but not in this case, my dear — bony... Not all being ill I'm afraid, you can tell by the look of him that he would naturally be that rather scraggy type of boy. And yet he was such a handsome child... Eight, and do you know he remembered me! He said, 'I used to call you Aunt Fanny.' I said, 'You must call me that still, dear,' because after all they call John, 'uncle.' ... Yes, very generous, but he always has been, especially to that family... No, surprisingly well I thought, pale, but being so fair and so much in the house... Oh, for an active boy, dreadful! But he seems not at all what one would have expected... Quiet and rather gentle. I remember Tom (my son, you know) when he strained that muscle in his leg. It was very painful, but I had such trouble and difficulty keeping him in bed, so active that inactivity told so much on his temper, and so high-spirited that the doctor could hardly make him — I thought Darcy, in comparison, very lacking in spirit. It is not as though he had been used to a healthy, active, English out-of-door life, is it? You know the other children knew no games, they've positively had to be taught... Oh, very difficult to deal with children of that sort. But at least one can be glad to think that Darcy can't miss what he has never had, can he? Very different from Tom, you see... Oh, older of course, Tom was ten, I think, or was it nine? At any rate when he had measles a year or two later it was just the same... I told Darcy that I was glad to hear he was giving so little trouble — though I believe there was some trouble at first. Lane, you know, the housekeeper, found that the laundress objected to so many sheets. The nurse was changing both sheets night and morning, really that does seem... *Isn't* it odd having a man, but I suppose

for a boy of that age... Oh, John chose him, himself... I believe they have some idea of giving him massage more and more as he gets used to it, though I've no idea... Oh, do they?... 'The lazy man's exercise,' how clever of them... You know I do think Darcy may not be very energetic and really I suppose it is a good thing under the circumstances. But I told him that he must be patient and not fret if he could not do exactly what he had been accustomed to do, that we all had things that seemed like trials at times. I said I hoped he would do everything the doctor told him and not make difficulties about the medicines, that I always thought some of the nastiest were the best for you. He said, very cheerfully, 'I only have one,' and seemed to be quite amused. 'They give me only one,' he quite laughed about it... Rather a queer boy *I* thought, but surprisingly cheerful...'

Sir Giles privately estimated the cost of it all and publicly maintained: One, that it was the worst possible taste to drag all over the country a boy who was obviously dying, and Two, that as these incurables notoriously lived for ever, John Darcy had simply succeeded in encumbering the estate for his son.

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The rector was the last to join the chorus, being from his age and habits of mind unlikely to take an interest in children and from his long association with the Darcy family the last person in the world to listen to gossip about the affairs of the son of his old friend. Dr. Temple had been a great Classic, in his own day, and a well-known scholar. On his marriage, late in life, he had been provided with this excellent parish, which with the help of a curate proved to be very little trouble to him. He had continued his labours in the classical field. He

was an authority on the schools of Alexandria and on the changes and modifications of the Greek language. In Latin, though of late he had done little there, he had some distinction in his youth and he had once demonstrated, to the satisfaction of those who agreed with him, the spuriousness of Quintus Curtius.

Young Calton came to him, laughing. 'Look at this, sir. It's in your line. Did you ever see anything like it?'

Latin verses. Darcy's. His first.

Dr. Temple read them carefully. 'Misguided,' he said thoughtfully, 'but exceedingly ingenious.' To Calton's surprise he read them again. 'Does it not strike you as unusual that the boy on such short acquaintance with the language should try to write it colloquially?'

It had struck Calton as unusual, deplorable. Darcy had heard about it. He had confessed quite freely that he was trying to write it as he would have written French.

'Has it ever struck you,' continued Dr. Temple, 'that this boy's mother was the granddaughter of John Marshall?' The younger generation looking blank, he explained: 'The editor and commentator of Hesiod. In that family it is not difficult to believe in inherited ability. I knew his son, a man of great talent, but he wasted all his opportunities. I am afraid he was a disappointment to his father.' It was doubtful whether Dr. Temple referred to defects of temperament or to his unfortunate lapse into mathematics. 'And so this is his grandson.'

He returned the copy of verses, with two sheets of comment, correction, and advice.

'What do you really see in it, sir?' said Calton, in despair. The idea of showing that to the youngster; he would triumph abominably. After what one had said too.

Dr. Temple underscoring a mistake, previously undistinguished, replied: 'Although his vocabulary is very small and he knows very little grammar he has managed to express not one, but a series, of not too simple ideas; not the least interesting feature of it is that he has something to say. And it is most noticeable that even if he breaks most of the rules he says it. You must let me know how he goes on, he may be worth watching.'

'This is the cripple, sir,' said Calton, with only outward respect. Really the old man was getting senile.

'That,' said Dr. Temple quietly, 'may disqualify him for cricket, but if he should live to have the proper instruction I see no reason why he should not become a scholar of the type of his great-grandfather.'

'Never,' said Darcy oracularly, 'put your teacher in the wrong — even accidentally. It's bad for discipline.'

'Has he been getting at you for that!' Charles was indignant.

'He seemed,' said Darcy reflectively, 'to be afraid that I might think I had scored; but he proved to me, in many ways, that I had not. So, of course,' virtuously, 'I believed him. As a matter of fact I should never have thought of it——' He broke off with an observation in natural history. 'Funny, people do different things. Jim goes white when he's angry — you go red.'

'Well, what do you do?' retorted Charles, goaded.

'Mine,' said Darcy gravely, 'is a singularly gentle nature. Aunt Fanny says so — everywhere.'

If he had intended to make Charles laugh, he succeeded.

CHAPTER VIII

HEAD OF HIS FAMILY

DARCY ate apples and enjoyed the feeling it gave him of being washed all the way down. It gratified two of his favourite feelings and he enjoyed simultaneously this satisfaction of his passion for cleanliness and, by its surprising extension, the resulting thoroughness of the whole proceeding. In addition his back was comparatively quiescent for the first time since the trip down... He was, rather carefully, forgetting the trip down, as he was doing with a good many things lately. He had developed a spot on his memory — a very handy oubliette — some things went in better than others; but they all went in with time and practice. Six months' experience had given him a better idea of his problem and a clearer judgment of his own capacity. There were moments, of course, one way and another, but they were delusory, they could not last. The business was likely to be a very long business, not very definite nor very satisfactory. A game against time, the stake — what? Self-respect, perhaps (but everybody does that), handicap, human fallibility and the odds on time. And success, well, there could be no success, at best it must be a matter of averages. At least he had the advantage (or was it a disadvantage) of knowing that he played; and he had promised himself, with a rush of the old fighting determination, that it should be a decent average.

If, at times, life seemed a triviality expressly designed for such as Aunt Lavvy, that passed like everything else. The important thing to remember was that nothing

lasted. And a very good thing too. The wise man ate apples and enjoyed it more thoroughly than most people.

He ate apples and made an estimate of the possibilities of the new life. It had two great advantages: the elimination of Aunt Lavvy, an event long prayerfully anticipated, and, as his uncle had suggested, the presence of the children. He had come far in six months since his first futile impulse to push them aside. The truth was that at the time he might have thought he was sane but he was not, particularly. Humiliating thing to have to admit, but there you were; all that you could do was to give thanks for the internal economy that permitted such things to take place in private.

The children — the others — must be his chief entertainment, and he had no doubt that he would find them very amusing. He always had; when he had been so pressed that it seemed he had scarcely time to live, he had watched them, known their ways, foretold them, and found them delightful. But he had never stopped to think about it, there was no time. He knew, without knowing how, that under certain circumstances one would do this and the other that according to his nature; and he did, like clockwork, and it was somehow infinitely amusing. But when he came to consider he could see that he had known very little. You got the effect without the cause. Charles, now, what was it that made Charles funny? Darcy had always suspected that it was some sort of defect in himself, but now — why?

Why was it funny to be conscientious and earnest? Earnest! — oh, Lord, there it *was* — but why? And then to see a person deeply ashamed of perfectly respectworthy feelings, industriously pretending them out of existence, impelled to it, not by fashion nor by public opinion, but by some deep mysterious internal necessity;

that was not funny, why should it be? But then he had never found Charles altogether funny. Only perhaps that he was so good and so serious and, without knowing it, as foolish as the rest of us. That he never dreamt that he lived in self-contradiction, that he had never *seen* himself in his life, that he thought he was a reasonable, responsible being instead of knowing that he was like every one else, absurd, more than a little weak, and not so very sensible. Not knowing; that was it. Never suspecting that it was possible to have illusions. The comedy of a person who wanders about the scene of a tragedy while it is taking place and away again never having known that anything had happened. And yet — it was his own. No, Charles had never been really funny. But you laughed. Well, you did not need much else to show you the depths to which human nature might descend. All you had to do, all any one had to do, was to look at home.

It was not an entertaining sight. Darcy knew, by experience, that it would cure him of nothing, except possibly a sense of superiority. It was only sensible to look at something else. Jacques, for instance — oh, mille pardons — Jim; he was really amusing. He had done exactly what, if you had thought of it at all, you would have known that he would do. While in France it had been the fashion to be French and spite the devil who, sober, was as English as possible, and drunk, much more so, Jim had been more French than nature; now, here he was more English than the devil himself! Darcy chuckled. Jacques Tournesol. You might have known it! In France he had rivalled Jean in demonstrativeness and in demanding attention, now it was the thing to imitate Charles — more, to have no feelings whatever. Jacques had adopted his new standards whole-heartedly, answered to nothing but Jim, talked nothing but cricket

or riding, never spoke of France, never seemed to think of it. His English was perfect. Oh, Jim was clever — and adaptable; yet what good had it done him? For what Jim had always wanted was spoiling, by something adoring and feminine probably, and there was no doubt that, given his looks, he'd get it later; meanwhile what Jean insisted on would do for Jim, but now? Now perhaps success would take its place if there was plenty of it, and at school with his cricket and his quickness in catching the tone... All very well, but now — now he had nothing, and an unobtrusive, self-sinking, self-supporting life might do very well for Charles, but never for Jim. For the present, with finely delightful inconsistency Jim had succeeded in hamstringing himself very cleverly. Add to that the fact that he was fairly miserable. Darcy had always known that Jim had less imagination (less at any one else's disposal, that is), than any one in the family. It was natural for him not to have realized — anyhow he had had a pretty bad shock on Thursday and he had stood up to it better than one would have expected, all things considered. The result of all of that was that Jim needed attention (a thing, mind you, that he had just cut himself off from), lots of attention, needed it badly; but attention from whom? Well — naturally — who else would ever do? But Jim had cut himself off twice over. For Jim was afraid. Interesting that, to have Jim afraid of you, none of the others... No doubt he thought he was tactful; but it was fear that made him look at the floor and talk about anything — even lessons. And pretend not to notice. Jim had never said a word; as far as Jim was concerned no one must admit that Anything Had Ever Happened. He must be abominably afraid. And so he was afraid and in need of consolation; he had renounced consolation; and the only person who would do

to console him was the person he was afraid of. What idiotic things people do to themselves! But what, Darcy wondered with a touch of malice, would happen if Jim did not get attention soon? According to all precedent the skies should fall.

Happily it was averted.

'Why aren't you playing something?'

'I hurt my arm,' said Jim languidly.

'Doing anything for it? Let's have a look.'

Jim surrendered the arm very willingly for examination. Darcy received it with gentle, unexploring fingers; he knew better than to inquire too deeply. There was a largish bruise near the wrist which they both knew perfectly was nothing. Darcy bit the side of his cheek in self-admonishment. 'Hard luck,' he said seriously.

'Oh, rotten!' said Jim, very bright-eyed; his wrist showed a suspicious readiness to remain where it was. Darcy looked him over with a twinkle.

'Miss me much?'

'Oh, awfully,' Jim's eyes filled with tears. 'Darcy, I — I missed you more than any one, really.'

He believed it, probably. Yet how much had he — really?

Less than Charles, much less than Tony. Darcy always wondered how much Jim would have bothered about him if it had not been for Charles and Tony making it the thing to do. With Jean adding a useful element of competition the result was, inevitably, Jim all out to eclipse the field. How much had he really missed him? A little more than you were allowing him perhaps — a lot less than he himself thought at present.

'Silly of you — that,' Darcy said gravely; but if there had been any one to see, his eyes would have given him away. As it happened there was no one, for Jim had his head well down in the crook of his brother's arm crying

according to this necessity. He cried very well, not noisily or gulpily but *very* heart-brokenly. It was a gift. Wasted, Darcy reflected humorously and with the more sympathy in that, at an earlier age, he too had had that gift — similarly wasted. All the same, my son, he commented mentally, you're not crying for the reason you think you are. Jacques, what should I do without you to amuse me? And with a brilliant sense of appreciation for himself cast for the part of an adoring female, he bent to his appointed and by this time accustomed task of consolation.

And last (as usual) Tony.

Darcy admitted to himself that he was puzzled by Tony. Tony had never been anything but a comfort to you till you thought he could never be anything else. And now he was giving you something to worry about. Tony, according to Calton, was stupid, which was, quite simply, a calumny and one that could have been perpetrated only by a stupid man. But Jim had taken up the idea with enthusiasm, Charles had been infected, and Tony, naturally, was fairly miserable about it. Tony, it appeared, could do nothing right, except, Thank Heaven, ride. No one had as yet arisen to deny that he could handle a horse. Darcy gathered with immense satisfaction that, in the matter of horses, Tony had succeeded for once in wiping the eye of Jim. Not from Tony, of course, he was probably unaware of it and, if he did know it, it was a thing he was sure to keep to himself. But Darcy gathered it all the same, partly from Anne, who was frankly delighted, and more especially from Jim's own attitude, which in itself was worthy of special delectation — very curious and interesting... Jim knew all right, but he could not decide whether to ignore it, to resent it or — well, the only thing that he had evidently not considered was acknow-

ledging it. How could he? Tony! And Tony stupid and clumsy! Darcy enjoyed his dilemma for him with great good will.

But the devil of it was that there seemed to be something in it. Tony, he had always known, was slower than the others, but he was quick enough himself to know how unessential quickness is. Tony was thorough, painstaking, and willing to work hard, and the result of all these excellent qualities was that he accomplished nothing! You would have said that such a thing was impossible...

Darcy took a hand hopefully, worked over his lessons with him, heard them first, knew that he knew them and then Tony would go into that room and fail — extravagantly. Was it funk? Just because every one expected it? Nothing could be more unlike Tony. Darcy racked his brains in despair. The only thing he knew was that Tony was not stupid. After the third failure he turned the others out of the room to tackle Tony about it alone.

'You knew that this morning.'

'I'm fearfully sorry, Darcy.' No one would ever know how dreadful it was to him to prove over and over again how stupid he was to the only person that had never believed it.

'You know it now.'

They went over it. He knew it perfectly. How could he do it now and not then, what is the difference? said Darcy to himself. For the hundredth time he assured himself that it was not funk, he was getting obstinate about it. Yet if he could say it now, why not then? Yes, but — they didn't say it, they wrote it from questions on the blackboard. Darcy looked at Tony with sudden intentness.

He knew it, but he couldn't tell it when he saw it.

'Hand me that piece of paper.' Darcy wrote, in rather a fine hand, Latin, the simplest words of the lesson and tried to extract a translation from Tony, standing at his shoulder. The result was appalling, it could have been taken for the wildest of guesswork. All the same he knew the words themselves well enough, but he seemed to have no settled ideas about the endings. One thing was certain: Tony didn't take one letter for two. 'Is that an e or an o?' said Darcy abruptly.

'An e — I think. Oh, it's no use. It's just — I'm stupid,' said Tony hopelessly.

'Yes,' joyfully, 'I think you are. Don't you know that you can't see? Can't you see that you must have something the matter with your eyes?'

'I can see it all right,' said Tony, 'on the blackboard if I look at it long enough. But they expect you to be so quick always and I never was, Darcy, you remember the time it took me to learn to read.'

'The fact is,' said Darcy calmly, 'you're very short-sighted. I should have known it before.' He held up three fingers of the hand furthest from Tony, a swift and passing flicker of a motion. 'How many, Antoine?'

Tony, frowning with the effort, turned and his hands went up to his face, involuntarily. 'It's the light,' he said, apologetically.

'Stupid of me,' said Darcy quietly. 'Give me your handkerchief and I'll tie you up. I thought you looked done up, been having headaches again?'

'Yes.'

'Worse?'

'Yes, a good bit.'

'Often?'

'Almost all the time — lately.'

Of course it was useless to expect Tony to complain

or Jim to notice anything, but what had Calton been doing, not to see?

'The fool,' said Darcy vindictively. 'Wait till I get hold of him. Stupid,' he contradicted himself gaily, 'you are not and never were.'

'It was stupid of me not to know.'

'My good soul, how could you, if you'd always seen like that? How could you know that every one else didn't have to look at it as close to as you did — that all right? Good. The fact is,' said Darcy deliberately, 'that you're *not* quick and you'll always have to work harder than the others, but you were born knowing what they'll never learn.'

'It's very nice of you to think so,' said Tony, completely unconvinced.

Darcy frowned. 'Look here — d'you know you were the only one to say the proper thing to me?'

'Me!' Tony was astounded. 'Oh... that was only the truth!'

'Exactly,' said Darcy drily. 'Listen, Antoine,' he dropped easily into French. 'Do you miss it still — France?'

Tony nodded.

'So do I. None of the others do. Come and talk to me about it. You can have the foot of the bed if you'll be still... and here, I don't want this pillow; take it and put your head under it. You ought to keep out of the light as much as you can.'

'Oh... I've always done that,' said Tony.

One on you, said Darcy, to himself, *you* never noticed that.

CHAPTER IX

THE LITTLE END OF THE TABLE

Darcy, more restored to comfort than he would have thought possible at one time, was, with his usual sanguine disregard for probability, essaying the improbable. That is, he was trying to extract a direct expression of opinion from Jean. Not that Jean's opinions were not decided enough; no one could complain of that at any stage in his career; but rather that they lurked in native ferocity within him, resisting even the comparative domestication of words.

Darcy fished expertly for an opinion of the new environment; he tempted Jean with the topic, Anne. But on the subject of Anne, Jean was a desert, a void, a vacuum. The fact of the slapping was admitted without reluctance, or, astonishingly, rancour. There was even on further examination lingeringly hovering the suggestion, the implication that Anne might have been right — surely a monstrosity! A stranger lays violent hands on him — on Jean! And he — absurd. The slap had not been all; it had not been unaccompanied, Something Else Had Occurred, but what? Impossible to say. Delightful promise of reservoirs of interest in the unknown in Anne and the unsuspected in Jean. Unless it was simply that Jean was susceptible to the feminine, a thing he had never suspected. It was true that he had lacked opportunity, but one judged it unlikely, especially when one remembered his unhesitating rejection (Why should I want to kiss her?) of Bess — a much more womanly influence. Darcy continued to enjoy

the suspicion that there was more here than met the eye.

On the subject of George, on the other hand, Jean was almost voluminous, his attitude, in the main, as his interlocutor savouringly appraised it, one of sedate disapproval. George, it seemed, did not do what he was told; if he was told not to do a thing, he did it to see if he could; if he thought it would do any good he cried. (*No!*) Yes, not very loud, but still very often it worked, so then next time, of course, he cried more — in short he was a silly little boy who, very often, would not eat his meals. Darcy was left aching with silent laughter at the lofty dignity of the recently converted. 'Why doesn't his sister attend to him?' Anne, it appeared, was held in check by the nurse, Mrs. Skene, who would not allow her to 'torment her little brother'; of course Nurse wasn't always there but still — Mrs. Skene was the one who gave him things when he cried; and not only that, but, quite often, Jean's voice lowered as he communicated the scandal, she told him she would give him things if he did what he was told. Sometimes, said Jean, piling crime on enormity, he wouldn't do What He Ought To Do because he thought he might get something for it if he waited. Darcy watched Jean's reaction to this, his first acquaintance with bribery, with high amusement. Jean was horrified, but there was fascination in the horror; he was visibly stirred and thoughtful; the Jean-initiated eye might discern traces of speculation...

'Pity there's no one *you* can work it on.'

Jean, at this evidence of mind-reading, was startled into one of his very rare spurts of laughter, accompanied by the usual lightning-like impulse to throw himself on the provoker of it; but, checking himself in mid air, he stumbled and almost fell on his face. Darcy re-

ceived a shock of enlightenment. Simple he had been to think that Charles would not tell! That was not plain, admonished, be-careful-of-your-brother prudence.

'Come along, then,' said Darcy quietly.

Jean slid over the edge of the bed like an eel, to lie tucked under the protection of an arm, shaking, but not, this time, with laughter.

'You knew,' said Darcy incredulously, 'enfant, you knew all the time!'

'I was good.' With concealment at an end Jean abandoned himself to the luxury of collecting all the credit that was due him. 'And, Darcy, I was sick on the train and afraid, and there was only Charles... I was good, wasn't I?'

'You were a saint,' said Darcy, astonished.

Startled, Jean raised his head to consider himself in this unprecedented light. He rejected the extravagance firmly. 'They don't hate it the way I do.' He paused, evidently searching wildly for something possible to offer by way of consolation. 'Would — Darcy, would you like me to tell you a story?'

Darcy found himself experiencing, in a higher degree than usual the touching delusion, almost hallucination (his only permanent one) that this was, in reality, quite a valuable child, and, if one knew how to look at him, not perhaps very usual-looking but above the average.

'I should be enchanted.' He was seduced by the prospect of beholding Jean in the unheard-of capacity of story-teller.

'Oh... I hoped you wouldn't.'

'Doesn't have to be original,' Darcy urged him. 'D'you mind not quite strangling me...'

'I'll tell you one Tony told me, he got it out of a lesson, so it's not much good, but you don't know it.'

'Good.' The combination was ideal, it would be easy

to disentangle Jean's contribution (if any) from Tony's literal narrative style.

'Well,' with a heavy sigh. 'Once there was a lion, no, there was a man, well, there was both; but *he* was a Christian.'

'The lion?'

'Don't be silly,' with austerity, 'and they met each other in a wood, Tony says in a wood, but I don't see what a lion was doing in a place like that — great big beast, he'd get caught in the bushes.'

'What do you know about woods?'

'There's one out there...' with a wave of the hand southward... 'full of bushes. The man's name,' said Jean, with sudden conscientious reversion to his story, 'was Androcles. He wasn't like me, because *I* shouldn't have bothered.' Interesting to see him trying earnestly to explain the man's doings by giving him a character first. 'Perhaps he was like you. No, more like Tony. Tony,' said Jean in a sort of sorrowful surprise, '*likes* to help people.'

'So Androcles helped him?'

'He took a thorn out that it had in its foot. That, being uncomfortable with the thorn, was the reason it didn't eat him right away. It wasn't,' said Jean in some scorn, 'a very good lion to let a little thing like that interfere.'

'Perhaps it couldn't think of two things at once. No, of course, the man ought to make it forget the thorn... well, perhaps it wasn't hungry.'

'Oh, are lions ever not? Well...' Jean conceded the excuse, it was one he was fitted to appreciate... 'but, Darcy, it wasn't very clever, anyhow, because it got itself caught with a lot of other lions. And when they turned them out to eat a lot of Christians, the first thing he saw, there was Androcles waiting to be eaten.

I think the lion was lucky to get another chance, but It was grateful (about the thorn) and thinking very quickly, il se bouchait le nez avec — avec la patte and said to the other lions, "'Take it away, it's not fit to eat!" And it went away and ate another Christian. And the other silly lions thought it knew what it was talking about!'

'That all?' Darcy was diverted even more than he had hoped. It was all pure Jean, from the doubts on, and especially the idea of a lion holding his nose was not of Tony.

'Tony says there's supposed to be a moral'... Jean grappled with it, it was his first moral-tale, Darcy's had not been that... 'but he says how can there be because how would any one not hate to have people do things for them, thinking all the time what they might get out of it themselves? But I think —' after a silent interval of struggle, Jean pronounced his moral. 'How do you know why people tell you things? Darcy, that lion was lying but none of the others thought of trying to see.'

Darcy reflected profitably on the twin, the intricately related subjects of George and Management, or, more accurately perhaps, the two were one, the concrete fact George giving rise immediately to the generalization Management. A difficult subject and one he knew something of, though he had never been weak enough to stoop to its poor relation, Bribery. A difficult subject. He admitted that the thought, alone, of anybody's attempting to manage him plunged him into a state of mind for which the only adequate relief was the action of pulling the roof down about every one's ears. He acknowledged that it was despicable to force on others what he would not accept himself, yet in his position what else could he do? Ceaselessly insist on obedience,

on his authority merely *as* authority with that growing less and less with each trivial assertion of it, until they discovered that it was, possibly, to be defied? And now, when defiance would reveal that authority as baseless — except, of course, morally and *that* would not go far with his family — what then? Leave it to some one more fitted? To whom? Charles (you might have known it) was helpless with Jean. His uncle had retired thankfully into impenetrable fastnesses of agriculture. Calton? Humour. Mrs. Skene? Satire. Anne? H'm, the most possible, but he could do it better himself. Management then inevitably. It saved every one trouble, gave power to those with the wits to use it, and, curiously, they didn't seem to object to it as he did. After all it was impossible to get along without it, base as it was; no one, he suspected, did unless like Charles they were incapable of it. Charles had never even discovered its first principles, and, if he had, he would never have been able to put them into practice. Foolish, that, to handicap yourself. Tied down to one method of dealing with the million manifestations of the world about you — and that one your own narrow personal necessity, without the faintest perception of the alien personality you had to deal with... no wonder Charles was useless with Jean. Charles would never grasp the idea that the way to manage him (or any one) was to treat him the way he wanted to be treated. Find out what he wants and give him a mixture of what he wants and what he needs. That was what worked. It was no use setting out to suit yourself alone unless you expected to travel in very limited company, or in no company at all, as Jean was evidently going to. That had its attractions and, indeed, it was probably the best way if you were not hampered by a need of seeing things done properly, which they never were, if people were left to themselves,

entirely to themselves, that is... If a judicious display of affection could smooth away the effects of a bad night for Jean and prevent another perhaps, then the ability to display affection was worth while and worth cultivating. Good Heaven! If the child liked to be petted occasionally, why should you go about as if the very idea poisoned you, when it did not in the least? If he had been a dirty sticky child, now, it might have been different. As it was Darcy had washed the cheek and kissed it with equal address and readiness and counted that, though by this time somewhat defiantly, as a gift too and not something to be ashamed of.

All this was as far as possible from George. George, now... what he needed evidently was to learn the meaning of the word obedience, and he was very lucky to have found, so early in life, a cousin who was able and willing to teach him. George's education had better begin as soon as possible, for what could be worse for everybody than to have even so negligible a person setting a bad example, that most catching of infections. It was better for all of them for George to take his place in the family and to begin by acknowledging its head. Darcy was waiting only for the opportunity for that demonstration, then George would get what he needed ...what he wanted could come later, meanwhile one watched him to find that out. It was not uninteresting and not unimportant, for the result was the addition of one to his daily comedy. Comedy it was, certainly, if you refused with a proper firmness to regard it as anything else. A comedy, then, watched with all the kindliness in the world for the unknowing actors, and especially for this, the most unprotected of them all.

George was really worth watching. He was obviously thrilled and fascinated by Jean and he gave the impression of walking round and round him, puzzled,

watching him from every angle with eyes the colour of greenish smoked glass; clear though, the clearest you had ever seen, clear like cat's eyes or those of any animal not trained, not used to understanding when you spoke to it, that had not yet conceived the possibility of communication with the world outside itself. It was no wonder George was surprised; he could never have come across anything like Jean, a personality hard to match anywhere; but it was not only that; when you came to think of it, Jean must have been the only thing of his own age that he had had a chance at. He was friendly enough in a delicate hesitating way, making careful little amicable remarks that Jean allowed to lapse limply without return, half offering things that he refused to see; generous clearly, he would have given Jean everything he had at the end of a week if he had shown any sign of accepting anything. George was visibly abashed by so much self-sufficiency. When you considered their real relative positions it was funny. But when you did not, it was unfair and something ought to be done about it. Of all possible things the worst would be to row Jean about it, he would promptly exchange indifference for hatred... might, anyhow, if Darcy took any notice of the child himself. He was not jealous of any one else though; was he not liable to that, used to the others because they were older, or too secure? More vistas of the unknown which was all to the good... But meanwhile George was being treated really abominably, poor soul, even for a rich relation — a very gentle specimen of the breed, and with all his small eager accessibility getting so much the worst of the exchange, if you could call it that with, on one side, everything rejected before it could be offered. Something must be done, and if the result reflected an interesting light on Jean, so much the better.

For George, plunged so suddenly into the seething excitement of the great world, the second coming was even more exciting than the first; partly because of knowing all about it for ages beforehand and having heard many astonishing things about Darcy, from Tony, and then partly because of not seeing them when they did come, although he had been waiting all day. And even next morning — only Jean and, this was the marvel of marvels, he was younger than you were and much smaller, little and queer and not saying anything except, in perfectly good English, that he did not speak English, which was certainly a very extraordinary thing...

Darcy too was as extraordinary as he had hoped that he might be, being ill not in the ordinary, unhappy, and rather untidy way but gloriously and mysteriously. He did not get up at all or do anything but had a man to look after him, and that, somehow, was a more dignified thing than anything you had ever imagined about him, even though you knew that he was older than them all and they obeyed him, and that he had astounding opinions about Father.

His coming made a great difference. No one came to the day nursery any more, and George was lonely at first until Tony remembered and came and took him in. After that he went in as often as he liked and no one took any notice. George was supposed to be playing with Jean, a difficult thing to do, but he was not generally, so he watched all that they did as much as he wanted to. He had never been into that room before, and though it was a big room it was, like all bedrooms, mostly bed; which is dull unless of course there is some one in the bed, which makes all the difference. One other advantage that it had over the ordinary bedroom was that there was a door into the North-West Room where the others had been having lessons, and now, in

the mornings, they opened the door and Darcy had Lessons too. Sometimes he (and Jean) stayed, nobody looking for them, and saw them all having Lessons — a solemn and impressive sight. Nurse, as long as she knew where they were, very often did not mind them not being in the nursery, and George was there as often as he could be even at first, but after the most surprising thing in the world had happened, he simply had to live there at all costs. It happened as if it was the most ordinary thing in the world, but it was not.

George was sitting on the floor trying to show a book to Jean, who was pretending not to look, because he had discovered that a book was the one thing that Jean would always look at.

'Don't bother about him, he isn't worth it,' that was Darcy, and having looked all round the room and behind him George could only come to the conclusion that it was meant for him. The room was, otherwise, empty.

'Why don't you show it to me?' said Darcy and smiled suddenly. And this great and powerful being, who lived in circumstances of such pomp and dignity, spent the rest of the afternoon reading to him!

From that moment Darcy was lost. It was impossible to resist the sight of George bringing all his books one by one, waiting with enormous eyes to see if you were going to read them and always the same blissful surprise when you did. It was necessary to check an idiotic tendency to feel obliged to him — so many people, after the first two or three times, would have, rather, been surprised if you hadn't done it, not that you had. It was George's chief merit, this quality of not being able to take ordinary kindness for granted, this miles of remove from any possibility of presuming on it; allowing you to taste the finely delicate pleasures of overture, reassur-

ance and the first hesitating intercourse with the shyest of small wild animals, with the advantage of the comparative security that it would not, metaphorically speaking, very shortly, too quickly tamed, settle down upon you shrieking for food and proceed to eat you out of house and home. Privately Darcy had always fancied that he might tame animals rather well, and it was frankly as entertainment that he set about the establishment of confidence; not that George did not trust him enough; no one could have been more confidingly disarmed to the most casual of passing strangers. In his native humility George was ready to believe every fellow-creature wondrous and gifted and therefore irrevocably removed from his own insignificance; he would, however, once his diffidence was overcome, put his faith implicitly in any one but himself. Dangerous trait... damned dangerous; by contrast, how well was Jean defended!

You might, lacking experience, have thought that sort of thing rather — abject. It was not. To Jim's 'Hands off, that's mine!' George's quick 'I wasn't going to take it, Jim, truly, truly I wasn't,' was not abject, it was the essence of self-respect. Darcy recognized that intense need of self-defence against the suspicion that you might trespass when you had never meant, when you had never even dreamed of it, when the idea of taking what was not yours indisputably was in itself abhorrent to you. Did George, too, know that other horrible feeling when any one refused a thing as if you had asked for it, when you had not and would have died rather? Did he, too, have that stupid pride that could not bear to demand, that made you helplessly throw away your rights rather than insist on them, so that it seemed you could fight for some one else only, never for yourself? That had made it very nearly unbearable that the price

of Jean should be that it was a favour... Wonder what it is that makes you think you can afford to laugh at Charles or Jim!

It was funny, no one having suspected him of being even particularly modest, how familiar that peculiar mixture of pride and humility could seem. And yet with it there was the curious distortion of seeing it in another person. These were characteristics which, from their not being imputable or indeed, understandable, to any one he had ever met, he had always considered peculiarly his own. Yet George recognizably had them, unless it was only imagination reading the known into the unknown. Perhaps they were not really much alike. His pride, Darcy suspected, had been more and his humility considerably less; if he had been inclined to trust any one, life had cured him of it very quickly; he had not, in comparison, been sensitive at all, timid and defenceless he had never been, for while you can laugh nothing can touch you... but then he had always been implacably strong and healthy which George demonstrably was not. George, too, had an appealing helplessness that was utterly foreign.

It was curiously hard to reconcile these results of direct observation with Jean's report, but that could not be dismissed. For Jean, saying little, saw much and very accurately, reporting essentials without embroidery. He might be expected not to err on the side of lenience. That was something perhaps. You could not expect a child to be an angel of consistency, you knew well enough from experience and memory how inevitably you did what you had never meant to when those fits of inexplicable naughtiness came on; the more you had meant not to, the more it came starkly out. But — bribery? And whose fault was that? Who presented that for his acceptance as the natural order of things?

No one, not insane, refuses things that are his without any reason; George's trouble must be the impossibility of knowing whether they were his or not, one day they would be, another not, how could you tell unless you tried? It was that — the nerve-racking uncertainty of everything — that made up the devilishness of the whole system — lack of system in the highest degree — for a child who, any one could see, needed above everything certainty, to know where he was and the protection of obedience. To Mrs. Skene, then, Darcy awarded grimly all responsibility for George's misdemeanours. A very satisfactory proceeding, placing the sympathetic character, George, in the sympathetic rôle of victim and the blame for it all upon a vaguely unknown female fool. It would be easy to put it all down to all women being fools — too easy; things, in Darcy's experience, were never as simple as that. Yet his list of feminine 'liabilities' was lengthening. His experience might be regarded as unfortunate; the only thing he had to list on the credit side was Anne. And she was less a Woman than a Human Being and more of a Benevolent Force than either. She was, in many ways, like her father.

As for George, as Darcy comfortably deciphered his character and settled his disposition, it might not be so necessary to hold a demonstration. George was a peaceful and willing convert, no captive of the sword. It was possible to hope that it might not be necessary at all, but if through his deplorable upbringing George should fall into Error, the best thing was to make it mercifully decisive. And let us hope for a providential attack of naughtiness, not just a lapse into uncertainty impossible to overlook, but an occasion for such burning humiliation. And have it over as soon as possible. As long as it was not over, you felt the uneasiness of the certainty that it must come to undo all the effects of established con-

fidence. But George continued to be a small charming monster of delicacy and discretion.

Darcy grinned at himself derisively as that baffled disciplinarian engaged urbanely and endlessly in games of his own invention or read, with one eye on George at his elbow, standing very straight and firmly on his feet, not moving his head, as if he were carrying something valuable, something very easily broken, alert and straining to pounce on the page and turn it at exactly the right moment. He might have come on to the bed but George, though he could stand still, could not lie still and, though not active, must wriggle. Perhaps it was just as well for that to be left for Jean's privilege. Jean, Darcy saw with some harmlessly malicious appreciation, was not enough alarmed to object to the assimilation of George, yet he was enough moved to show a little scornful security and more superior contained aloofness. He was like a cat watching a dog small enough for it to handle. His attitude suggested that Darcy and George were indulging in unauthorized orgies of fairy-tales and nonsense-stories while he withdrew, disassociating himself from their excesses. His air of severe morality was a delightful thing.

Darcy and George rioted shamelessly through "Alice in Wonderland." Jean viewed their idiotic hilarity with austere propriety. Ingeniously skipping, they skimmed the cream of Sylvie and Bruno:

> He thought he saw an argument
> That proved he was the Pope;
> He looked again and saw it was
> A bar of mottled soap.
> 'A fact so dread,' he faintly said,
> 'Extinguishes all hope.'

Jean's austerity merged finally with exasperation. He could bear it no longer. 'It's not true, that couldn't

happen. It isn't *possible.*' George, stiffening, shot a glance of horrified inquiry at Darcy; his breath, faith, and his enjoyment painfully suspended, he looked for authority to exorcise the blasphemy — or, horribly, was it true?

'No,' said Darcy, 'perhaps not, but wouldn't it be nice if it was?'

Safely his tone and manner conveyed the impalpable essence of the attitude, 'We deceive ourselves for our own amusement.' Wide-eyed George absorbed it. It was a game, it was two games one inside the other. Unsuspectingly he swallowed the inferred sophistry that thus it was twice as much fun. He was exhilarated and a little dazed in the flash of the vision of such anxious unexplored depths. He would have liked to say that he had not believed it, but he knew too well that he had.

'It would not,' said Jean crossly, 'be nice at all. Ce serait affreux.'

Darcy and George exchanged the smile of the initiate, the sophisticate, the civilized; they tacitly agreed that he was very young, and silently they expunged the critic and his unseemly criticism from the records of memory.

'You should not blast his illusions, suddenly, like that,' said Darcy severely.

Jean defended himself: 'I did not say that it was silly. That was what I thought but I didn't say so.'

'You are an unpleasant child,' said Darcy impatiently. 'He is much more pleasant than you. D'you know that I am ashamed that this is what I have brought up compared to what that old woman has turned out?'

Jean looked at him carefully. It seemed that there

was more seriousness in it than he liked, not that he had ever wanted to be pleasant...

'If I am good, must he always be here?'

'Come early if you're awake... not before five.'

It was a bargain verging on bribery, but after all it seemed a pity that Jean should not have even one opportunity of tasting that deleterious sweet.

'I am good, then,' Jean conceded, resigned. 'It makes me so tired, always that.' He was pathetic.

'Get out,' said Darcy unsympathetically, 'what do you think it would be like if you never did anything you didn't want to?'

Jean contemplated such a glorious prospect blankly. He found it impossible to believe in it. 'I expect I should be dead then,' he said gloomily; even at the age of seven he did not believe in Heaven on Earth... 'For,' he added pensively, in the tone of one worn by the years, 'I've done nothing else all my life.'

And not long afterwards George was, by the mercy of Heaven, undisguisedly naughty.

In silence, enforced by Jim's hand across his mouth, they carried him out of the room, down the hall, and dumped him on the stairs.

'Now yell as much as you like,' said Jim, 'your father *may* hear you. Next time perhaps you'll do what you're told.'

George sat as he was left, too much astonished to take advantage of the freedom of his mouth, although he was fairly certain that his father was out. He rubbed his arm thoughtfully, he had never been handled so firmly before. Watching them out of sight, he noticed that they did not go back to the North-West Room. After a few minutes he went cautiously in that direction. The door of Darcy's room was shut, not locked. He fiddled

for a moment with the handle, turned it experimentally, went in, not in a spirit of defiance, only to see what would happen....

Nothing happened. Darcy was alone. He seemed to be asleep. George approached on tiptoe, he had nothing particular in mind. He halted at the head of the bed, uncertainly. Darcy looked funny with his eyes shut, so still (but wasn't he always?) What made him look so different from every one else with that funny white line about his mouth that didn't show when he was smiling or reading or telling stories... This was a different person entirely, stern-looking, frightening...

George would have gone away if he could. How could he get away without waking — Darcy's voice arrested him.

'Look here, my son,' he said quietly, 'didn't I tell you to go away?'

'Yes.' In a whisper.

'Well, listen to me; if you are going to have anything to do with me, you are going to do what I tell you at once and without any sort of fuss. There are lots of good reasons why, but only one that counts, and that is that Charles and Jim and Tony always do what I tell them and any one of them can make you do whatever I like. And if you think that you can get over them by making a fuss to Nurse you'll find that a mistake. I'm not going to make them hurt you. As long as you do what you're told, they'll never touch you again. I shan't tell you to do anything that you can't do or anything that you oughtn't to, but either you have nothing to do with me or you do what I tell you, at once, because I tell you to do it. Do you understand? Very well then, you can go.'

George went.

He went to a very quiet safe place that he knew of,

and there he wept, because now there would be no more stories or reading or funny things the way they all did them together. For it did not seem to him that anything could ever be the same again, and it was very clear to him that he had been exceedingly silly to spoil everything, to turn Darcy into something so terrifyingly different, just for not doing what he was told. It did not occur to him that his offence was forgivable, and as he would not, at first, go back to face that difference, he passed a very dull three days. No one to read, Bess was at school, no one to tell stories — Tony, probably he wouldn't either, and you could never get hold of him away from — and he didn't really tell stories very well anyhow, not after...

Darcy's three days were not very good days either. What a nice tale to go to his uncle if Mrs. Skene chose to carry it! The unpleasant part of it was, that not he, but the others, would bear most of the blame. If George told there was little hope that Mrs. Skene would not. George did not look like a sneak, still he had had no one to bring him up with principles... yes, it might be very awkward. He was conscious of the best intentions, some one ought to look after the child. Things had gone farther than he had thought. George had whined, a thing, for one of his nature, stinking of corruption. It should go no farther if Darcy could help it; George should have at least a chance to live up to his possibilities. George was too good material to leave to a servant to ruin. On a sudden intuition of his uncle's feelings, confronted with such a piece of impertinence in the mind of Darcy Winteringham, Darcy lapsed into what even charity could only describe as a giggle. Still, of course, what you thought would be nothing to him and it was nothing to laugh about, all that good confidence so laboriously acquired gone to smash in five

minutes. He began to feel that he had been too severe, yet how could any one have been milder? He had only explained the first principles of human government clearly and unemphatically. All that would have been the merest commonplace of daily intercourse with Jim... 'But you knew jolly well that he was not Jim'... in fact he had done it very badly.

Darcy was not sorry to see the end of those three days.

George, memory partly effaced by desperate boredom, had decided just to go and see. He chose an hour when Darcy would be alone, then if it was not right he could go away very quickly, not interrupted and no one seeing. Darcy was having his dinner. George ought consequently to have been in bed. Neither of them, however, thought that matter worth dwelling on. George halted anxiously just inside the door. Darcy did not look formidable eating. It had always fascinated George to see him eat — flat on his back, hardly moving, he could eat quite drippy things without spilling a drop — even soup. He was not frightening now, but that might be because he was looking at the soup and not at silly people who — besides who would look frighteningly at soup? Suppose he was just going to take no notice. George advanced a few steps, not far, just enough to give him a chance to take notice — if he was going to....

'You here,' said Darcy quite amiably.

'Oh,' breathlessly, 'did you want me not to come?'

'Where,' said Darcy cheerfully, 'did you get that silly idea? Is that the reason you've been neglecting me?'

George gasped: 'You told me to go away...'

'My good ass, I didn't say go away for good, did I? Not very strong in the head, are you? Push over that fish.'

George noticed with regret that he had finished with the soup; still the fish had a sloppy sort of sauce on it quite hard to eat with a fork. He looked at the soup hopefully, a lot of it left. 'Aren't you eating this?' negligently.

'Oh, help yourself. Take the pudding spoon, I'll get along on the soup-er'... They dined together very amicably. Under the influence of relief George ate quite a lot of very nourishing food; lukewarm soup of a kind he had rejected at lunch, fish, food he had never liked, and good rice pudding which he had half an hour ago refused with contumely to eat for tea.

'They will think I had an appetite to-night,' said Darcy calmly. 'You'll probably be upset later.'

George assented casually, he was used to it. The thought that was really occupying his mind was whether things were sufficiently restored for him to ask for the end of the story.

'Where did we leave off?' Darcy magically suggested it himself. 'You can have the end of the bed if you won't wiggle.'

George had it, breathlessly and carefully inert. He did not hear much of the story, worried by the singular mystery of one person being at once like That and like This and the urgent necessity of keeping him like This and preventing a return to That. He had never given much consideration to the looming imminence of Charles, Jim, and Tony as presented to his prudence, partly because he believed exactly as he was told that they would not hurt him, partly because of his happy ignorance of the varying interpretations that may be put upon the verb 'to hurt,' but mostly because he knew very well and very firmly that he was never again to do anything that might not please Darcy. For, for one instant, this kind, comfortable, and really understand-

ing person had spoken with the voice of Father, than which nothing could be more terrible and it was never going to happen again.

'You'll have to get along, you'll be missed.' Darcy's lips twitched at the rapidity of George's tumble to his feet. 'Come here.' He held out a hand, George approached awed, guided by the hand bent down, ever so far... 'Keep the soup for my sake,' said Darcy in his ear, and imparted to it, by the use of a very simple expedient, an interesting small thunder-like shock. George, thrilled, uplifted and in possession of a new trick, left more than ever convinced of the desirability of doing everything, everything in the world.

CHAPTER X

HIS UNCLE'S CHILDREN

ONE other person at Caldersham found Darcy a great addition to the family. This was Blackie, a large self-made cat who had risen from the stables to commanding position in the nursery. He made no secret of his approval: Darcy was by him assiduously frequented. Darcy's virtues from a feline point of view were many and of the highest distinction. Repose (one always knew where to find him), in a position ideal in every way, restful, accessible, surrounded by warmth and softness, tactful, courteous, welcoming but in a self-respecting manner, a quiet voice, a savant and reticent finger, reserve and judgment in intercourse, a respecter of another's dignity, a personality independent but not intrusive. In return the cat brought loyally to the exchange his own qualities to make the exchange a fair one. A suave, cool, well-licked coat of evening black and white, cold satin-parchment ears, a round, hard, palm-filling, responsive head, a warm, white-furred, muscle-guarded, loosely curled resting-place for a thin hand, a sleep-drugged, purring-at-a-touch, contented, comforting presence, a discreet companion when the nights were long, no tale-teller at all events.

Unfortunately he was, in Anne's estimation, Anne's cat. She had been, at least, the ladder by which he had climbed. Thus to the sting of rejection by a discerning and fastidious judge was added the indignation, hot and righteous, of one deserted, for his faithlessness and ingratitude.

It was ridiculous, Darcy asserted, to call a cat Blackie when he had as much white on him as a black cat could have without degenerating into a formless piebald. Challenged instantly to produce a better name, he offered Tybalt, King of Cats, with a cunning and well-thought-out penalty for the first one who should call him Tib. This was allowed even by prejudice to be superior. Though the name was less applicable in reality, for he was a very peaceful animal, than in appearance — one of elegant Satanism, with his svelte taille, his black coat, head, and nose, his eyes ordinarily shut almost to slits, the unequal white markings of his muzzle, white feet, great white smock-front, wide white shirt with the white hairs a fan spray on the black shoulders. He was at his best at night, for, with his air of wearing evening dress, in the morning he had, to Darcy's eye, a look indescribably rakish which belied him.

Tybalt accepted his new name with indifference. If any one imagined that he would come for any name under the sun, they were mistaken. Anne complained. 'He'll stand outside the door and yowl until you open it for him. And then he'll sit down to decide whether it's really him that wants to come in or you that wants him to. And if he thinks it's you, nothing could drag him in.'

'He doesn't,' said Darcy gravely, 'like people who take things for granted.'

'H'm,' said Anne critically, 'like you. I suppose that's how you know.'

Darcy intercepted Jean's quick glance of involuntary respect. 'Lady's mixed,' he said lazily, 'she was describing you.'

With a little almost inaudible laugh Jean curved down to rest his cheek on his brother's hand. It seemed

that there was, at any rate, something about the description that he recognized.

'It'll take only about ten minutes altogether,' said Darcy consolingly, 'and then you'll have a hole to whistle through.'

He signalled to Charles to keep his hands off, Charles doomed to take Jean to the dentist. A pilgrimage of horror for both of them.

'I shall talk like mère Grugnon,' murmured Jean with distaste, but after a few seconds he went silently and of his own accord. Charles followed. It was difficult to fathom the morality of the decree of Providence by which it took Darcy's being ill to make Jean improve from day to day in virtue, but you were naturally thankful for it. Under the circumstances.

'Will it hurt very much?' asked George breathlessly.

'It'll hurt the dentist,' said Darcy forebodingly, 'ten to one he bites! What will you have?'

'I should think,' said Anne invidiously, 'that you might have something better to do than telling silly stories to children.'

'As it happens,' said Darcy placidly, 'I haven't.'

George after earnest consideration choosing Beauty and the Beast, Anne subsided with grumbling and scorn, but she remained. It was for a while an outwardly peaceful scene.

'After all he's my cat,' she remarked at last broodingly.

'Keep your cat at home, then,' said Darcy calmly. He stuck up two fingers for Tybalt to groom his whiskers on. It was Tybalt's idiotic acceptance of this foolish invitation that pushed Anne beyond her expected limits.

'Very well, I will!' She tore the amazed and incredulous Tybalt from his place, his place that he had chosen and preferred; every one knew that he had chosen

it; for an instant they struggled furiously, then he dripped like an enormous spoonful of black treacle (but leaden, a stone and a half of disgust) to the floor. 'Go then,' said Anne stormily, 'if you haven't the decency to be ashamed of yourself... I suppose *you* think that's funny!'

'He was rather,' said Darcy tactfully but with difficulty. And at that: 'You are sickening,' cried Anne, 'meek and lowly and all that. But the truth is that you wouldn't suffer your god-like calm to be disturbed by any one of us little people, would you? No, you're unnatural, you've got to be much better than any of the rest of us. And you go about thinking, "Auguste or Horace or Nicomède..." Nicomède! You! And look at you! Do you know what you are? You're comic.'

'You don't think,' said Darcy quietly, 'that I don't know I'm funny, do you?'

'I hate you,' was Anne's brief, inconsequent, but on the whole not inadequate response. She banged the door behind her.

'You've no right to talk to him like that,' cried George after her, in a passion of protection, half crying with the storm of excitement that anger in others always raised in him. 'I'll tell Bess, let me go — let me go, Darcy. I'll hurt you if you don't let me go!' Darcy only tightened his grip. 'Dad'll make her ——' he tore at the hand that was holding him... 'I'll tell him...'

'You'll tell nothing,' said Darcy firmly.

'I'll hurt you, I'll hurt you awfully ——' his lunge took Darcy off his pillows, 'Oh, darling, have I hurt you much!'

'Not — much ——' with an effort that left him, for the moment, drained of life and gasping, he dragged himself with George for anchor back perhaps two feet. Fancy all that for two feet... 'No, it's all right,' he

stopped George who was darting away to fetch any one and every one, 'stay here.' With George hovering in an agony of remorse and uncertainty, Darcy, once more, took the precaution of keeping a hand on his arm, 'I'll be all right — in a minute.' There was, amazingly, some truth in it. He was getting off more lightly than he would have thought possible. Yet when you came to think of it, there had been less and less pain these last three months. He said normally, 'You can come up if you're quiet.'

George crawled up by inches, but it was hopeless to expect him to be entirely still. Darcy submitted to some anxious inexpert petting; he was, several times, quite all right now. George was easy to deceive.

'Darling,' said Darcy teasingly, 'where do you get that from? Bess?'

'Bess says I mustn't talk like servants,' said George disconsolately, 'and Charles thinks I oughtn't to talk like Bess. What does he say when he feels like darling?'

'And *if* I knew,' said Darcy with mock severity, 'do you think I'd give him away?'

'Tell me what you say,' said George quickly.

'Idiot!'

'Then I shall call you that,' said George, laughing and settled suddenly down into Tybalt's vacant place. Darcy accepted him silently. It was funny to find things like yourself in some one else. None of the others... He said, experimentally, 'People are funny, sometimes, aren't they?'

'Almost always, I think,' George hesitated, then confided the result of six years experience, 'but,' he said warningly, 'they don't like to know you think so.'

Damn them, said Darcy heartily but inwardly. In his opinion they had no right to let the child find it out so young....

John Darcy cut Mrs. Skene as short as possible, and, having extracted the kernel of information from the husk of her grievance, he dismissed her as soon as possible. Divested of periphrasis and irrelevance it amounted to this, that Darcy was interfering with the discipline of the nursery, that he spoilt both Jean and, what was less credible, George, that he incited them to defy authority. That Darcy was a rebel he had never doubted, that he 'took things on himself' he had had proof, that he should spoil Jean was natural, but George? That gave one something to think of, and very unpleasant too. There was no doubt that he had been rash to bring children of such antecedents into such close contact with his own. But, in reality, he had not intended the contact to be close. He should have foreseen that that would arrange itself. The others would not have mattered perhaps; they were here only temporarily after all. But Darcy. The eldest, hence, probably, the most to be feared. He had from the first deprecated Darcy's influence over his brothers, and now he would have to consider the influence of a boy of that sort on his own son. The worst of it was that one said 'a boy of that sort' without knowing precisely what sort of a boy it was. But what could one expect? John Winteringham's son, for fifteen years in close association with his father, under his influence at the most impressionable age, and the boy no ingenuous fool. What was his mind? What could it be? He was sixteen. For once John Darcy's impenetrability to impressions of age was pierced. He was, very properly, disturbed.

It was true that what he knew of the boy was not entirely to his disadvantage; he could be, on occasion, very passably unselfish, he was undeniably brave, he was fond of one, at least, of his brothers. And so are many others not exactly desirable companions. He was

capable of deceit and also of telling the truth to his own hurt. That was the fact most in his favour, that and the motive for it (though who could tell what that was?) the only comfort John Darcy could find in a review of Darcy's known qualities. Mrs. Skene, probably a prejudiced witness, knew less than himself. Calton should know but did not; immature, inexperienced, and lacking in judgment. He had volunteered that the beggar (with characteristic inability to see that the colloquialism was infelicitous) worked, that they all worked better when he was there, that Jim was not so lazy and Tony much less stupid. But no one had accused Darcy of lack of common sense. That he had shown signs of interfering with discipline (Ah), but when the thing had been put to him he had come to his senses. The young fool pluming himself on some imaginary advantage. The boy had probably turned him inside out and laughed at him. Well, there was nothing for it, he must interview Darcy himself. Luckily he had the pretext. He went rather thoughtfully upstairs.

> It felt that, in spite of all possible pains,
> It had somehow contrived to lose count,
> And the only thing now was to rack its poor brains
> By reckoning up the amount.
> 'Two added to one — if that could but be done,'
> It said, 'with one's fingers and thumbs!'
> Recollecting with tears how, in earlier years,
> It had taken no pains with its sums. —

'Your hair,' Darcy broke off to remark, 'is mostly in my mouth.'

'Oh, do you want me not ——' said George hastily...

Darcy told him not to be a little fool, tickled him, and allowed himself to be kissed on the ear. The sight of George in process of 'taking a liberty' (Mrs. Skene's remark when he tried the new trick on her) was one he

always watched with a sense of delicate comedy. The opportunity, flagrantly offered, George's startled perception of it, the initial impulse immediately dismissed but returning with redoubled force, some seconds delightful hesitation, then the final rash act done in a rush that was one quarter eagerness and three quarters sheer delicious terror, a moment's acute anxiety and then, when he was sure it was quite all right after all, his exquisite and helpless felicity.

And then to look up and find his uncle standing in the doorway. How long had he been there? Darcy was very sensibly annoyed. It is all very well to unbend, but to be caught at it. And by a man who had probably never done such a thing in his life. Of course it was impossible to tell what he thought by the way he looked.

'You wanted to see me?' 'Alone' was understood in his glance and his uncle's nod. 'Then I'll finish later, infant. Come back, if there's time, before tea.'

George climbed down in a whirl of emotion. Anne had done it first, she had made it seem to be Darcy's fault, she could turn anything into anything. Now Darcy was in trouble. He flung himself on Darcy's neck and embraced him violently. And having thus, to his own mind, defied his father, he went off as fast as he could to find Bess and pour his version of the tale into her horrified ear.

Darcy did not share his illusion. He knew that Anne would not tell tales, he could not account for his uncle's presence, he was not trying, he had other things to think of. Principally that affection and sympathy were all very well and he was not ungrateful, but it did seem that they might manage it without walking all over your back in the process. He remained silent, it was not his business to begin the conversation, though goodness knows he generally had to. His uncle had come to

say something. Then let him say it. He seemed to be in no hurry.

'The child is fond of you,' remarked his uncle at last.

'He'd be fond of any one who'd let him be. Most children are,' he added with a vague idea of blunting the edge of his reply, for it was true that John Darcy enjoyed very little of his son's affection.

His uncle paid no attention, he seemed to be thinking deeply. 'Does he,' he said eventually, 'strike you as being unusually — ingenuous?'

'Most children are,' said Darcy in astonishment. 'Well — yes,' he corrected himself, 'even for that age.'

'That,' said John Darcy watching him intently, 'is a good thing. I prefer it.' He was glad to see that the boy, in spite of all his quickness, was perceptibly at sea for more than a few seconds and when he did penetrate the meaning he lost his temper with gratifying thoroughness.

'Is there any reason why you should come up here to insult me?' said Darcy injuriously.

'I am very glad to hear it,' said John Darcy bluntly. That checked him; he was silent, evidently digesting the implied doubt and the implied acceptance of his own rejection of it.

'It was not necessary,' said Darcy at length in a low voice.

'I could not know that.'

'No,' Darcy acknowledged it. It was the bitterest and most difficult act of honesty of his life. Some rights are denied to the sons of John Winteringham. But a thing he had not even dreamed of as possible. A thing that surely even his father would never have done... or would he?

'I am sorry,' said his uncle, dispassionately.

Why didn't the man go, why didn't he go!

'Mrs. Skene complains,' said his uncle after a pause, 'that you undermine her authority. She says you tell the children not to obey her.'

'I'm glad she's come to that,' said Darcy wearily. 'I've been thinking I ought to tell you...' With an effort he recalled his mind to the list of Mrs. Skene's misdemeanours. Instances that he had been collecting with a gradually growing uneasiness and a premonition that he was going to have to thrust himself again between his uncle and his uncle's peace and comfort.

John Darcy listened in astonishment as case after case of insufficiency, mismanagement and ill-judged *leniency* was cited with some hesitating, yet every case was detailed and every charge specific. Here was a new point of view. Bribery, insistence on trivialities, serious faults condoned, discontinuous authority, a sort of control by working on the emotions very exhausting to a nervous child. He had never thought Mrs. Skene perfect; some drawbacks are inherent in every régime. Still the list was long. He listened silent, in doubt. He had not expected to hear Darcy at such length in rebuttal.

'Another thing,' said Darcy (it was an awkward thing to say to any man, but under the circumstances you were less fussy than you might have been about what you said to him). 'She always says: "If you don't I'll tell your father." Of course she has no idea of doing it, but he believes her, naturally. I don't think she ought to be allowed to threaten him with you, it makes him afraid. I told him that she wouldn't dare to. And then she's always giving them medicine, for no reason as far as I can find out. I don't think it does them any good. I think George is more likely to be sick after he's had it than before...'

'What sort of medicine?' said his uncle sharply.

'Several,' said Darcy, 'she likes a good bottle of medicine herself. But there's one, sweetish stuff. Jean says it made him go to sleep the way he never does and feel funny afterwards. There was a woman,' said Darcy with some diffidence producing a reminiscence of the past, 'who gave stuff to her children and they said,' he saw that his uncle understood that, and switched to, 'so I told Jean that if she gave him anything, if it was castor oil to take it, but if it was anything else to yell the house down first. I suppose that's what she calls undermining her authority. George didn't see why he should take it if Jean wouldn't.'

'That's very serious,' said his uncle. He realized that here at last was something more than the charge and countercharge of children and servants.

'You can prove it,' said Darcy, 'Jean knows where she keeps the bottles. She doesn't know it but he does. He told me; it's in ——' he gave a detailed description. John Darcy found the story, wild and incredible as it seemed, increased in credibility. Darcy had never seen the place he described, yet it was easily recognized. If Jean had not lied he had discovered a scandalous —— the thing was criminal. How long had it been going on? How could the woman come to him knowing... Her charges had been vague and nebulous enough, she had shown some discomfort when he asked impatiently for anything definite. She had not, probably, intended to go so far; she must have hoped to drop a few hints that would cause him to forbid Darcy to meddle in the affairs of the nursery. And that he had nearly done. He asked himself the familiar question: What did he actually know of this woman? That she had been supplied by a reputable agency during his wife's illness, some weeks before her death. What had been her chief recommendation for her position? A disposition to stay

in it. He was truly appalled. The whole thing must be investigated at once.

'If this is true,' he said slowly, 'I owe you something for letting me know.'

'No charge,' said Darcy softly, but people never listen to your best things... perhaps this time it was just as well.

'Darcy,' said George, rather white and worried, 'Nurse is going away now, to-night, before tea...'

'There'll be tea just the same,' said Darcy calmly. It was not George's fault of course, not possibly in any way, it was unjust to hold it up against him when it was not his fault. But it was rather too hard not to be unjust. At present.

'I know,' said George, disconsolate. 'Jane'll bring it. But who am I going to say my prayers to?'

'Oh, good Lord,' said Darcy helplessly, 'why not say them to me!'

'I should like to,' said George. And it would have been silly to worry about anything as long as Darcy was there, laughing.

He said them, very earnestly and secretly, in Darcy's ear, more and more confidential, with the pressure of a small, cold, well-washed, quite bearable cheek, with only one break in its narrative form, to the breathless appointed end. 'Amen, you are dreadful,' hilariously shocked but admiring, George accused him: 'You tickled me with your eyelashes!'

And Anne missed it all. She went to bed and missed it all. She did not even have any tea. No one had ever seen her cry yet and they were not going to begin now. It was an exercise she despised in others and an exertion almost unknown to herself. So she spent the rest of the

day in bed and missed everything and did not even go to sleep at the end of it. She could not think what was the matter with her. She began to be very tolerably convinced that she must be ill. Generally she rather liked losing her temper, it made her feel vigorous and effective. But this was sickening. She could not explain to herself why she could not hear her favorite story told — when he could do nothing, absolutely nothing! — and he liked it too, and told it as well as anything. She could not tell what it was that made it seem so awful to see him taking everything that happened and never saying a word. Only when you felt like that naturally you said anything on earth whether you meant it or not.

At last, when she was quite sure she was not going to sleep and yet was still totally unable to locate any sort of a pain or ache, she got up and in a business-like way she did her hair again into its two long plaits. She went down the corridor to wash her face. It would be nice to put her head under the tap but it would take years to dry all that hair in the middle of the night, which showed that she was growing up. Last year she would have put it under without thinking and gone to bed wet. It was dark in the corridor, very late, every one had gone to bed, lucky there was nothing to fall over.

'Is that you, Tony?'

Darcy. Oh, what did he want? He must have ears like a bat. 'Me. Is there anything...'

'No. All right. I just thought it might be, that's all.'

'I wish you'd let me.'

'Hullo,' said Darcy, with more animation. 'What's the matter with you?'

'I don't know,' said Anne, deliberately, 'why I had to go and say that.'

'Oh, good Lord, I'd forgotten it! (It's only the pil-

lows, you can fix them if you like.) As a matter of fact you were rather on the spot, it was a goodish guess in its way. Only,' Darcy condescended to explain it, 'it's not that I think about being like them or even that there ever were people like that or that any one could be. It's just that it rests my mind to think that any one could ever imagine them. Thanks, that's a lot better.'

'All the same I should never have said it.'

He pulled the long plait that switched him in the face, amicably. 'Nonsense, you want something to happen now and then. No one wants a year of Sundays.'

'Oh, why don't you *do* something!' said Anne hotly. 'Why don't you ever *say* anything, why do you always act as if it didn't matter!'

'I like to be talked about,' said Darcy grimly. 'I want people trailing their sticky pity all over me, I love to be gushed over, I've got the patience to be fussed at, haven't I?' Besides, he added less comprehensibly, if you were always noticing things people got tired of you; if, for any reason, you — you just by being there — drew their attention to things they'd rather not think of, they'd rather not see you. It wasn't fair to say that this was unjust of them because he knew they couldn't help it. He had done it himself, tried not to and done it all the same. Oh, yes, much worse than anything they could do. After all no one had a right to make people uncomfortable. You were only too lucky if they didn't dislike you. If you made them feel that they were not treating you properly, only *too* lucky. The one chance you had was to make them forget it — or at least overlook it more or less. And luckily they did it very easily if you let them.

Anne was not entirely convinced by the argument. It still sounded a rotten sort of way of going on to her

but there was no use saying so. She said, 'Well, I'm glad you forgot.' A silly thing to say but she meant it, if that was any reason for saying anything. 'Well, good-night...' but she lingered. 'Isn't there anything I can get you, a drink of water or something to eat?'

'No... thanks.' It was not entirely conclusive.

'What is it?'

'Nothing you can get.'

'Oh, yes I can... Don't be so superior!'

'Cigarettes, then,' said Darcy curtly.

'Oh, do you...' in surprise.

'Not when I can't get them, naturally.'

Anne withdrew deep in thought.

On her not-unhoped-for return one noticed with approval that she had had the sense to bring both matches and an ash-tray. Dependable, this...

They lit matches surreptitiously. 'You've brought too many, they'll be missed.' Cigarettes rolled on the blanket under a lean forefinger as he tried to decide how many he could spare.

'If he does,' said Anne rashly, 'he'll only think Eames took them or one of the footmen. I dare say they do... Oh, Darcy, don't be silly! Take one, anyway... Take as many as you like. I'll say I took them... Oh, yes, he will. He knows I never bother to lie to him. Besides I have before, to make candles for a church I built with books and things off the mantelpieces.'

'Four candles.'

'Six,' said Anne jealously.

He took four.

'I needed that.' It was funny to see him smoking. Like a wild beast. And the hand with the match shook.

'Do you miss it awfully?'

'Not ordinarily... You'd better get along. You ought to be asleep.'

'What about the ashes?' It was incontrovertible. She sat on her feet in the big chair, with the fur mat — long-haired, heaven-knows-what kind of an animal — off the floor, over her. 'So ought you if it comes to that.'

'What's the good?' After an instant he answered her astonished silence. 'I have a dream that wakes me up.' He explained rather carefully. It was funny. He had never had dreams before, only the usual not having clothes and heaven knows he ought to be cured of that by now.

'What sort of a dream?'

'About my father,' said Darcy briefly.

'Oh... did you like him very much?' said Anne sympathetically.

'I hated him,' said Darcy, with a sort of contained violence. 'I still hate him. And if I ever do anything that he did may I be eternally damned... I had to say that to some one... I don't know why it should have to be you... I shouldn't be talking to you about him.'

'I like it,' said Anne promptly. It was all very thrilling. 'What does he do in your dream?' You could see he ought to tell. It makes it so much better. If it's horrid.

'He does things — different things, to the others. And me like this — not able to do anything.' Of course, he said, reasonably, it was silly not to remember that the man was dead, but you never did at the time.

'Why don't you do something to make you remember, like sleeping with your hand over your head? They say lying on your back makes you dream. But that's no good of course... I never dream because I always sleep on my face... Oh, you know what I mean! Don't be idiotic.' All the same she had made him laugh. 'I don't wonder you hated him then. I wish I could have been there to help you go for him.'

'You'd have been a good one,' said Darcy, undeniably amused.

He sounded much better. And she was the only one who could have done it, for he would never have let his brothers steal cigarettes for him. Anne settled the mat more air-tightly.

'I say,' she said companionably, '*did* he bite the dentist?'

It was beginning to get light when Tybalt arrived to find his peaceful haunt profaned by ribald if subdued hilarity. Anne swooped down upon him at once. 'Here you are, take him!' Tybalt found himself planted, not too gently, in his own particular hollow just above the place where there should have been a hip if Darcy had not been as straight as a match. Unhesitatingly resentful, Tybalt left that spot. He sat on a cold expanse of floor despoiled of mat, embarking hastily upon his toilet to pretend that he had not been discomposed. 'You beast,' said Anne warmly. 'Any one'd think you never belonged to me!'

'Cats,' said Darcy, chuckling, 'don't belong to any one. They belong to themselves.'

'Silly cat,' said Anne tauntingly. 'Washing your black always. Do you think you can make it white?'

'He doesn't see why not,' Darcy defended him. 'And he believes in trying. Buck up, old boy, I'd do it too.'

Tybalt, thus encouraged, stopped washing with a startled air, as if, Anne remarked, he thought they were trying to trap him into it. A few moments well-simulated uncertainty, and then he stalked over to the bed and jumped up on it.

'Nobody wants you,' Darcy assured him.

Tybalt settled into his usual place with every sign of peace and satisfaction.

'You seem to know enough about it,' said Anne considerингly, 'to be a sort of honorary cat yourself.'

'Better get along now,' said Darcy. 'Or you'll be caught.'

And in that case what price a daughter!

John Darcy could not help responding to Bess's narration with the feeling that this was too much, was he to have another day spoilt from the start? Yesterday had been enough. His interview with Darcy. Unsatisfactory. He had been, perhaps, too hasty, too emphatic, his words not exactly what he would have chosen that they should be; they would only have been justified if they *had* been justified and they had not. His interview with Mrs. Skene. The second. The discovery of her array of patent medicines, with which she was calmly experimenting on his son, and one, at least, of them suspect. He was not to be pacified by her voluble assurances that it was a good soothing mixture she had used for both her own dear bairns in their last illness. The fact that these had failed to survive the ordeal had not, it seemed, shaken her faith in the remedy. This interview had been purely grotesque in its absurdity. It seemed that there were no limits to the ignorance and folly of the people one was forced to depend on, not those in his employment at any rate. Dismissing as hysterical an impulse to take the doctor's opinion, he had had a very unsatisfactory interview with George, which (George having been unable to interpret his father's visit as anything but, obscurely, an act of retribution) had only served to show him quite conclusively that though the child might be fairly sound he was certainly very much afraid of his father. And now, if that was not enough, Anne...

'I don't remember exactly what it was she said but

she practically laughed at him for being a cripple,' said the horrified Bess.

Her father was no less disturbed. And this was *his* daughter. 'Send her to me,' said John Darcy grimly.

Anne entered to Darcy, looking at his breakfast. He seemed to have no intention of doing anything else to it.

'He says,' she announced cheerfully, 'that I've to apologize. I told him *I* didn't mind. I've never seen him so — magnificent. He said that in his house, as long as he was in it, he would see that you were treated with every consideration.'

Darcy's eyebrows humped themselves into an unclouded expanse of forehead. He seemed not so much surprised as reflective. He said something or other in French and then — 'I mean, not really.' As if he was trying to persuade you he appreciated it when he was only considering something else.

'I say, don't you want that egg — or that marmalade?'

'Take the toast, too,' said Darcy amiably.

CHAPTER XI

PERVERSITY

It seems almost absurd to say that Darcy missed his father, yet, say what you like, his father had been a man and, even though their every contact had been a disagreement, nothing could alter the fact that his father had been forced towards the end to treat him almost as an equal. After that he could not find entire satisfaction in the society of children, servants and schoolmasters. A softening influence. He needed a man. His father had been eminently masculine; compared with him Uncle William and the people in offices had hardly been that at all. And now? He ran over his resources. They were most insufficient.

Calton? Too young, antipathetic, better than nothing.

Dr. Temple? Too old and interested only by the idea of his writing Latin verse and following in the footsteps of his great-grandfather. Darcy decided impatiently that it was a mistake to have ancestors. To be successively and simultaneously the son of John Winteringham, the grandson of Robert Marshall and the great-grandson of John Marshall, it was simply a series of misfortunes. He wondered uneasily if there were any more of them that could make a nuisance of themselves. Not that he objected to the Classics, they were something to do, they were quite passably interesting, they were not even, so far, very difficult. John Marshall therefore was less detrimental than the others. Still Darcy preferred, infinitely, to be himself. On the whole Dr. Temple was better than Calton. He knew things, he

had more point of view. As for the curate he was so busy pretending not to be a clergyman that his mind was not at any one's disposal.

Charles? Charles was too much the younger brother.

Fletcher? Fletcher! He knitted. He drew mental and moral support and sustenance from the works of Mrs. Barclay. And, having sampled his taste in literature and refused to share his degrading occupation, Darcy turned to devising a scheme for seeing as little of him as possible. He spent some time on it and produced a rigid schedule which reduced the time to be spent daily in Fletcher's company to two hours and a half. Even that was too much; Fletcher was a depressed and melancholy person; he had many troubles all of which resolved themselves into the complaint that nothing had ever happened to him. At times he became tearful. Darcy rebelled; he would not be wept on by a man of thirty-five; he would not be (literally) bathed in his tears. He exerted himself, he became without conviction an adept finder of bright linings for other people, he was specious, he was plausible, he was ingenious, he was bored. Fletcher, unfortunately, ended by really admiring him.

His uncle? Well, was it likely? He made occasional raids on the trail of some misdemeanour. Darcy was coming, gradually, to be responsible not only for his own brothers but for George, Anne, and sometimes even Bess. This was owing largely to Jean who, publicly and privately, owned no other authority. It was natural and necessary to deal with him only through Darcy and this extended itself as naturally to the others. Darcy, in this way, became Viceroy. He was inclined to be ashamed of the fact that, after so many years of self-dependence, he should find a certain comfort in having so many things settled — and not by him, in being told firmly, categorically, imperatively what every one

ought to do — generally what they had not done. Spiritually he laid himself down to rest, for the time being, in the shadow of authority. Not that it was necessary to agree with the man to do what he said. He put it all down to a softening of moral fibre under the influence of his surroundings. And he looked forward to his uncle's incursions, they relieved an ennervating atmosphere.

Darcy, then, made the discovery that the next best thing to a man is a woman — Anne's governess, the only one who had showed any ability to cope with her, a Frenchwoman, a widow with young children, who lived in the near-by small town and came out every day. Rather an awkward arrangement. She was not long in discovering the extraordinary improvement in the nursery French or in tracing it to its source. She took immediately a vigorous interest in Darcy, she set herself to correct his speech, to eradicate the more pungent of his colloquialisms, but it is to be feared that while she eradicated she enjoyed and they spent many a cheerful half hour exchanging reminiscences, gems of popular speech, vivid stories — they were both good story-tellers — instances in which the truth had suffered corruption to the benefit of the corrupter. To these last Darcy could only contribute tales of hearsay and imagination, for he had always been too defiant to lie and though his imagination was good his fiction could not hope to compete with Madame's fact.

The association was a happy one. He admitted that he could never have borne to have been regulated by her as a member of her family, but he admired her immensely for her wit, her independence, her ability to handle any situation, her unfailing cheerfulness and satisfaction in a position not too replete with material blessings. She admitted that if he had been her son

he would have been brought up very differently, but she admired him for his courage, his common-sense, his spiritual self-support. She was in the habit of repeating with approval the saying that though the people of many nations could starve with courage, the French were the only people who could enjoy themselves while they were doing it. And in this respect she was forced to admit Darcy as an honorary Frenchman.

She taught him how to read French poetry, she lent him books, she tried to give them to him; but there he was recalcitrant.

'Why do you bother about him,' said Anne, 'when it's me you're teaching?'

Madame with deserved severity corrected her manners, but she took the hint. The books were bought and charged to John Darcy.

Darcy found that being managed was not, perhaps, quite all he had thought it.

CHAPTER XII

VALMONT OBSERVES

In the year 1908 Jules-Victor Valmont, at the age of twenty-five, found himself, for his sins, in the city of London without any very visible means of support. He had been there for two years. His only regular income was earned by giving drawing lessons at a girls' school, and most of his spare time spent studying Chinese painting. It was not gay, but in those years he forged the line that afterwards made some noise in the world, as he ransacked galleries or moved heaven and earth to obtain the privileges of private collections — for his soul was set on portraits, there were no mountains in his vocabulary — with an enthusiasm that was echoed in the permanent contention of his later life that all other art was vulgar. Not excluding his own. Yet no one has ever called him a modest man.

But in the winter of 1908 he was not at all sure where this was leading him; he could not, with some depression, see how it could fit in with his chosen corner of human nature; he was irritated by his way of life, and disgusted with his employment, hating England because he could not afford to buy himself the only sort of food he had ever considered eatable. He worried over his work (at present largely projected and non-existent), while, with great labour and infinite wasted effort, he made some curious synthetic 'impressions' of the children who spent their days roller-skating in the hideous concrete areas between the houses that crowded about his depressing and unpleasant lodgings. Studies,

mostly in line — strength in delicacy, fineness and ease in strength, le talent dans l'inhabilité, ah, the unattainable! — movement, not violent but not arrested, and one or two attempts to turn that line to character. Mechanically and without much hope he sent them the rounds and eventually, children being salableish, several of them were published. And that is how he got his first commission.

The whole thing was very uncomplimentary. But there you have it; an eccentric member of the species squire (or what it is they choose to call it nowadays) having a disagreement with his sister over having the children photographed, declining to go to the trouble of having them done, when cornered taking refuge in the excuse that he preferred a real portrait; challenged to produce his idea of one, tumbling in the nick of time on a set of reproductions (children, what could be better?) in one of the illustrated magazines; making inquiries, offering the unknown his first commission. And making no secret of the whole discreditable proceeding. If the young unknown had put too stiff a price on it, he would have sent the children to a good photographer. It was most humiliating. One took it because one was sick of fog and London in December, and the money meant deliverance from the girls' school, a passage to France and a fraction over to start on.

And, so, having warned his gentleman of the slowness of his methods, news that was received with no evidence of excitement, he travelled down to Caldersham, prepared to stay as long as seemed discreet. It depended, of course, mainly on the cooking; his mind dwelt largely on that art. English home cooking might not be wonderful but it was better than stale bread and atrocious coffee — it costs so abominably to look presentable enough to get into private collections, sales... He looked

out of the train windows gloomily, here he was... even in his young days they had said, 'Jules bows three times if you mention Toulouse-Lautrec, and at the name of Daumier he knocks his head on the ground,' and now! What was he doing, setting out to make pretty pink and white pictures of children of the English upper classes? Girls, probably. He never wanted to see a girl again. Children! The ones he had used, thin-faced, keen, sharp-witted, hungry often, had been alive and of a certain character, but these others, well-fed, pretty-mannered, dead-alive, wool-brained, nursed, governessed, run in a mould, children brought up in prosperity of that sort could have no character. But to get back to Paris! And what a fool he would be to hurry back with the winter not half over, underfed as he was. No, he was prepared to put up with many things to stay as long as possible; he needed rest and nourishment before facing Paris unemployed, with two sous in his pocket. And time to straighten out his ideas, which had got themselves hideously and hauntedly muddled in the last two years. He had, in fact, lost, temporarily one hoped, his original fairly clear projection of the future of his own talent — an eye for character, a neat gift of satire, a turn for caricature, and a possibility of pathos, which he had painstakingly strangled in the cause of art. Those ambitions did not satisfy him now. He did not know where he was nor where he wanted to go, he was restless, he felt urgently that he was wasting time, but he had nothing that he cared to do. That is what comes of having hobbies that interfere with your work.

Meanwhile it was just possible to take an interest in his exotic surroundings. The estate, an English estate, he had never seen one, was a disappointment. The house was hardly out of sight of the gate. It was true that there seemed to be more land at the back, until by a

turn of the drive, the back was discovered to be the front. What a bad arrangement. The house was better, a fair-sized eighteenth-century house, well-built, of good material, a stone that had weathered admirably to the local golden colour. The whole place, with the unsoftened rectilinear bulk of its main block, its height and the masked extent of a further adjoining wing, could never appear anything less than solid, uncompromising, and impressive.

What the outside of the house suggested the inside carried out unsparingly. This then, Valmont decided, is le home. The temptation to prolong his stay in it was lessened, almost abolished, by dinner tête-à-tête with his host. Though the food was beyond his expectation, the coffee by some miracle passable, and the port! Yet, as he went to bed — half-past nine, nothing else to do — he decided to get through his work as quickly as possible and go. He felt that he could not survive many such evenings. M. Darcy, in his own house, at his own table, dressed — one ought perhaps, but how? — in all the superiority of his probably thousands of kilos of bodily fitness, mature, laconic, imperturbable, in all the prestige of security and position, had a most distressing effect. One felt rather smaller, though we cannot all be giants, and very much younger than one cared to appear. It was only too likely that the man knew that it was a first commission.

'I believe,' said M. Darcy thoughtfully, 'I shall turn you over to Darcy.'

Valmont, subdued by an early breakfast, with tea as a substitute for coffee, was ready for anything. Anything above all that did not include M. Darcy.

M. Darcy led him upstairs and introduced him, with somehow a sudden effect as of thrusting him into it, into a large room filled and as it seemed streaming with

the sunshine of fair hair. About the only kind of sunshine they had in this country. The room was not only filled, it was crowded. One by one their figures disengaged themselves from the enveloping anonymity of confusion, and after a period of dazed computation — the man had said 'my children' with not a trace of numerical indication — Valmont turned on this stupendous person towering unaware beside him, an involuntarily respectful eye. Eight! There were eight. A family worthy of a former day. Under these circumstances Valmont missed the greater part of his patron's remarks. He pulled himself together hastily, with only the obscure information that this was Darcy who would look after him, to face the battery of eyes that awaited him. Out of this uncertainty he found himself being offered a hand and, disconcertingly, being addressed in good French by a boy of eighteen who was lying full length, but shallowly cushion-propped, on what struck him immediately as the ugliest piece of furniture he had ever seen. A gigantic couch, but altogether formless as if some one had chopped off the larger part of a dais and draped it in sackcloth, sackcloth of an écœurant greenish hue. Where are the ashes? one asked oneself instinctively. He tore his eyes from this excrescence, accepting the offered hand: 'But he is ill,' his mind protested with energy, 'very badly ill,' and M. Darcy receding from him imperceptibly, he was left high and dry to be ludicrously looked after by this lucent bilingual invalid.

While he was replying mechanically to his courtesies, Valmont was occupied in resolving this peculiar illusion of lucence, of concentration of light, into its component parts. A little the background of depressing green rejecting the light in his favour, a part the pallor of sickness in one very fair — so fair that one noticed the blue vein in the upper lip, an effect one had never seen noted

— and part, the most contributing part, a most impetuous abundance of fair hair, whose vigorous cowlick was its only element of order, the ends of which caught the light in a way that could only be commended. The face itself was enough to catch the attention; the forehead well-proportioned, eyebrows marked, eyes well-set, widely spaced, well-opened, notably intelligent, alert, attentive, direct, and impersonal; nose of some prominence that left one in no doubt as to its anatomical basis. The cheekbones had the same virtue, the chin too, a useful angle and spare as one could wish. And the best mouth he had ever seen on a boy; character there. The whole effect predominantly one of balance and fine spacing.

These reflections were driven out by uneasiness and a certain apprehension. Eight children, all of them English, and most of them boys! He must manage them all, and he had never figured himself, even to himself, a disciplinarian. Thus preoccupied he was shorn almost painlessly of the illusion of M. Darcy's prodigious feat of paternity. He felt himself in a position of forlorn and rather chilly eminence, full of responsibility and supported only nominally by ——

'Your things,' said Darcy intelligently; 'you'll need some one. Tony!'

Tony presented himself with an alacrity that was relief-giving as evidence of some one's, however unreasonably, having authority. Mon Dieu, said Valmont to himself as they set out for his 'things,' this is what I shall have to perpetuate. A healthy solid-looking schoolboy, with soft mouse-coloured hair lapsing over his forehead to straggle into the short-sighted blue-grey eyes behind thick glasses, general expression amiable stupidity. 'I am fortunate,' he said aloud, 'but a little surprised to find that you all speak my language so per-

fectly, and the child — not an English type surely. Your half-brother?'

'Oh, no. It's just that we lived there when we were children. Our people being hard up.' A shocking example this of English frankness. 'And Jean never would change his name. I —' Tony smiled, and one discovered immediately that he was shy, though he did not, as Charles did in spite of himself, blush when one spoke to him quickly. 'I didn't want to change either, but I don't look it. Me being Antoine. It would have been silly.'

Indeed it would have been absurd. Nothing could be more out of keeping for the undistinguished typically English-looking Tony, whose only notable feature, the mouth, was of that rather large, thin-lipped, sensitive type with the upper lip lifted a little at the corners and giving the impression of being so much more ample than the lower that was, one fancied, the typical English mouth. One saw it most often in English women. It was this mouth, Valmont had had occasion to reflect, that must have been responsible for the English accent. There was something about the conformation of this upper lip, seemingly so stiff but in reality very flexible, that imposed the exaggerated pronunciation of -ere, ear, -ly, and produced the English i. And, in fact, Valmont noticed with satisfaction, the accent of Tony was more foreign to him than that of any of the others. This was, however, about as much interest as one could wring out of Tony. So with a passing wonder that any human being, even an English one, could combine two such contradictory qualities as sensitiveness and stupidity and the casual thought that such a combination must prove most unfortunate for its possessor, Tony was properly dismissed as negligible.

'I don't care,' said Anne hotly. 'It isn't fair. Why

should we have to, if you don't? Dad didn't *say* so, did he? Well, I'll just go and ask him, then you'll see.' She swung down off the table and swirled out of the door.

Valmont watched her traject with perplexity, he was feeling more than ever cast away and denuded, one by one they were escaping him. Bess and Charles were already gone before he returned and now...

'She thinks you ought to do all of us,' Darcy explained, 'whereas of course my uncle only meant you to do them.'

Valmont agreed that it was sufficiently obvious. 'But,' resignedly he indicated the depopulated room, 'what am I to do? I am deserted.'

'You still have one.'

'Oh... me first?' came in a subdued murmur from George, sitting harmlessly on one foot high up on Darcy's right.

'I overlooked you.' Valmont smiled; in effect he was not conspicuous and not formidable and, too, not deceptive in so appearing — not with those eyes. 'I suppose,' said Valmont to himself, 'if I had the gift I should paint that, label it "how I wonder!" and use it to advertise shaving-soap or tobacco.' 'What do you think I am going to do to you?' he asked not unkindly.

George didn't know. He was, though not in the least distrustful, not too sure of anything. His attention focussed on the group on the couch, Valmont now, for the first time, saw what it was that Jean was doing. He had a jeweller's catalogue, with pictures of string after string of pearls, all naturally just alike except for size, and a box of paints. With exquisite care and really with surprising dexterity, for to touch that highly glazed paper without ruining it was exceedingly difficult, he was painting each one of those pearls a different and a robust colour. His colour-scheme was easy to grasp at a

glance. Reading from right to left, each pearl corresponded to the order of colours in the box. 'What shall you do when you come to the end of your colours?' Valmont inquired. Jean without looking up inserted a fingernail between the two pearls that formed the exact center of the necklace. Darcy translated, 'Turn and go back the other way.' And Jean threw in unexpectedly, 'Besides, they're not mine, they're his.' The handle of his brush stabbed in the general direction of George. 'Ah,' said Valmont, vaguely, 'c'est gentil!'

'He'd lend it to me if it was him,' said George, crimson with embarrassment.

'He would!' satirically from Jim, all legs in the deep armchair. 'He is not generous, notre cher animal.'

'Not,' said Jean unmoved, 'unless he had practised a lot first so as not to spoil it.' Delicately he dipped his brush in the water of a small glass that one now saw with some surprise, Darcy was holding convenient in his left hand. Jean loaded the brush, ground it on the motionless palm already liberally streaked with bright colour to the wrist, and applied it with a skilful sweep.

'Difficult, eh?'

'Prussian blue is the worst,' Darcy supplied to fill what was only too obviously going to be allowed to be a void.

'I believe it, but why,' said Valmont to George, 'do you leave it all to him? Is it that you do not like it?'

George's glance went swiftly up and down and sideways at Darcy, but shyness evidently held him dumb. 'One feels,' said Darcy gravely, 'that one shouldn't display one's paucity of talent before a real painter.'

'And you?' Valmont advanced against Jean's very effective wall of silence.

Jean merely shrugged, a gesture so eloquent that

Darcy's chuckling explanatory 'S'en fiche,' and Jim's gibing 'Shameless, shameless!' were alike supererogatory. They passed unremarked, for Valmont was staring absorbed by the exotic in such a gesture in this atmosphere. What monkeys children were, and retentive! And, this one, in his way was as much misplaced as his gesture. Unintelligible. His features were curiously lacking in harmony, yet each taken by itself was permissible, even admirable, it was only in conjunction that one found them invraisemblable. Valmont appraised them; the heavy dark hair, soft yet stiff enough for coherence, swept back from the forehead, his best, as the eyebrows were the most noticeable, of his features; the eyes generally hidden, unexpectedly light grey in colour, when he did look at the world it was with a coldly hostile gaze. The likeness to a sparrow-hawk, a little falcon, needed only the addition of an even slightly aquiline nose to be perfect. But the lower part of his face contradicted the upper, that, Valmont considered, was distinctly the brow of a rebel; the lower face spoke equally of refinement, delicacy, fastidiousness. The nose, straight and finely made, was too short, too small. The mouth, though, carried some hint of the useful qualities of endurance and determination. Altogether a curious jumble, and in miniature. Jean was, in advance and irrevocably, condemned to go through life chained to the adjective 'quaint.' One felt that he would resent it. Not that his quaintness was unpleasing, one felt that if there had been a touch of humour, high spirits, whimsicality, melancholy or any informing spirit strong enough to fuse the disparate elements it might have had charm; but there was nothing stronger than a close indifference. If faces indicated anything, here was character, but what character it was hard to say. Valmont arranged himself to work in no very good humour;

two of them were interesting, consequently he was to have neither.

'He says,' Anne entered on a wave of triumph, 'that he can do as many as he has time for before every one goes back to school.'

Valmont felt his temper slip, with ugly premonitions of a landslide. So that was it! Well, he had made a serious mistake if he was counting on slowness to deliver him from the consequences of this cowardly way of dodging a little temporary trouble. Valmont had no difficulty in making up his mind that they should *all* be done if he had to split himself to do it. Then he would feel the difference between eight heads, at so much per head, and three de même. The price had been a scandal anyhow. 'Then,' he said crisply, 'I must have one of the school-goers if you please.'

'Bags I Sunday,' said Jim, hastily; the door closed behind him before he could be arrested. Tony, hesitating, threw an appealing look at Darcy. 'Anne,' said that authority firmly. 'You're It.' And Anne, astonishingly, for one could not suppose her willingly subordinate, was It, while Tony sank gratefully out of sight.

'Well, anyhow,' Anne announced jubilantly, '*you* won't be able to get out of it. Saint Sebastian... All beautiful, with arrows. Pious too!' George shrank aside as she swooped to enforce, with in reality but a very gentle violence, Darcy's hands to the required attitude of pointed piety.

'Hi, you, look out for the water! My good girl,' he added indulgently, 'your ignorance. Sebastians don't pray, they have their hands tied.'

All the same the girl had an eye. It was not an impossible attribution. Valmont accepted his first model with some approach to complaisance. She was dark and hence promising. She satisfied the eye, especially in

action; she moved well; it was a pleasure to watch the swift and accurate rhythm of her feet; and she had been so eminently useful that it was quite possible to forgive her great likeness to her father — of whom, indeed, she was an almost literal translation into the feminine. He fell to work hastily; he would need every second; he cursed the slowness of his method and the stiffness involved in posing children. Anne sitting still was an anomaly. Lunch took him by surprise.

'My uncle,' said Darcy, 'is out a good bit. He gets back at all hours so the others never wait. They have theirs in the schoolroom. I thought perhaps you'd have it with me.'

Valmont was only too pleased to avoid as much as possible the society of a man so capable of annihilating his self-respect; and, after a suitably slight conveying of willingness, he accepted the promptly offered invitation for dinner also. The others, which, particularized, turned out to be Charles and Bess, appeared to run no more after the head of the house than he himself was inclined to do. They too dined upstairs, a curious household. They breakfasted though... 'But,' Valmont objected, 'I did not see them.'

Darcy grinned. 'You were too early. They joined the herd to meet you and fed afterwards.' He said carelessly, 'My uncle's never late.' A thoroughly useful hint.

Contentment thereupon overflowing into confidence, Valmont shortly found himself talking of his dislike of the pose and his desire for action.

'H'm,' said Darcy thoughtfully. 'Would it do you to see them act? Oh, yes, that's one of the silly things we do. You'll see all the rehearsal you can bear if you stay about here.'

'But that will be admirable!' Nothing could be

better, what a blessing that they should have contracted the acting fever so à propos. Genially Valmont informed himself of their proceedings. The play, it appeared, was a semi-annual affair, had been, that is, for the last few years. In order of age, they had the right to choose the play and the parts they chose to play in it, the others had parts meted out to them. The first play had been 'Cinna' with Darcy, Auguste; a 'good sedentary part,' was Darcy's serene comment. Valmont expressed polite admiration of their prowess. The second, Bess's choice, was 'Romeo and Juliet'. There had been a certain difficulty in filling the part of Romeo. They had almost given it up; in the end, one gathered, Charles had been sacrificed. Valmont discovered that he was being inspected for signs of humanity; he presented what he hoped would do. 'I should like to have been there to see it.' He had, Darcy assured him, undoubtedly missed it; it had been magnificent. It was enough, Valmont was convicted of acumen and a following humour. They were on the best possible terms. Valmont congratulated himself. The third play had been 'Heraclius,' with Charles as Martian-Leonte, *not* Heraclius-Martian. They were, Darcy apologized for the excessive explanation, easy to mix up. 'I cannot accuse myself,' said Valmont gravely, 'of ever having mixed them up.' This too was acceptable; what a curious mixture he was, with his out-of-the-way knowledge of the unknown Corneille, and, too, one liked the simplicity of taking the Classics as something to read or to perform. The current play was 'Much Ado About Nothing,' with Anne doubling Beatrice with Conrad. 'A curious choice.' Valmont was safe being vague. Darcy laughed. 'Oh, solely for the pleasure of calling me an ass. I'm Dogberry, you know.'

'I shall look forward to it,' said Valmont, diplomatically.

All that week he worked as he had never worked before, while the stream of life and histrionism swept through the North-West Room with abating and recurring vigour; and at the end of it he was fairly sure of being able to finish in the short time allowed him. He could not help asking himself what Darcy must think of his unremitting industry, he could not be innocent enough to imagine that this was what his uncle had intended; but Darcy was absolutely non-committal, impenetrable. Why, if he knew, as he must, he offered no deterring hint Valmont could not make out with any satisfaction to himself. His only possible hypothesis was not a pleasing one.

Being relegated to the schoolroom one studied schoolroom politics. Valmont observed their manœuvres, alliances, and divisions with amusement, following as far as he could the ripples and cross-currents of their intercourse. In the main he found that, like any other body of humans, they fell loosely into two groups vaguely antagonistic. In this way the series Bess-Jim-George opposed the series Anne-Tony-Jean; series they could be called only with the most cautious reservations. They were very lightly constituted; for Bess was a member only unconsciously and in the sense of favouring the other two, while George was an unwilling inclusion obviously yearning for the status of non-combatant. Jim, however, was capable of all the belligerent activity that could be required of him. He attacked freely, Jean, Tony, and, with singular inconsequence, Darcy. The other series was much more nearly an alliance, though Jean replied to attacks only by indifference and ignoring the attacker; while Tony positively laid himself open to attack, he seemed incapable of replying; he was evi-

dently, though unostentatiously, fond of that brother, and he suffered for it in the exchange of hostilities. Anne, as one might have expected, was the active member of her alliance; she defended both Tony and Jean with ardour and skill. She was not slow either, on her side, to attack her chosen opponents — Bess, Jim, and, mysteriously, Darcy. There was, in addition, this difference, that Jim distinguished George only to slight Jean, while Anne treated the little cousin with real if casual affection. Charles was outside of and untouched by the whole affair and so, one would have said, except in a presiding and regulating sense, was Darcy. Yet while he received the attacks of Anne with good-humoured acquiescence, and threw a kindly protection over George, who, on his side, was openly idolatrous, and although he was singularly unresentful with Jim, he seemed, at moments, in a veiled way, ranged in opposition to him; at times he definitely set himself to shield Tony, at others to offer Jim what Valmont felt rather than knew to be subtle provocation; and in this connection he was so conscious of undercurrents that he came confusedly to wonder whether Jim was not almost as much attacked as attacking. Between Darcy and Charles matters were fraternal with a certain amount of rather careful indifference affiché, between Darcy and Bess, everything very proper.

One might have thought that all this remûment, this tohu-bohu was not the best thing in the world for an invalid; nevertheless, whatever went on in that room, and for the children it was the heart of the house, Darcy and his atrocious piece of furniture were at the centre of it. They were, equally, useful. It was a footstool for Anne in her favorite seat on the table, a back for Tony in his on the floor, the younger children lived sprawling upon it. They ate his meals, they appropriated to their

own uses both his time and his person and he was by turns or simultaneously book-rest, pillow, and raconteur. Every one left their valuables there — 'keep an eye on it for me, Darcy' — hats, coats, caps, bats, watches, riding-whips, once even a pair of riding-boots — 'tell Jim he's not to have them' — the enormous black and white sybarite Tybalt, Tony's dog, a mongrel animal picked up God knows where and supposed to be rigorously confined to the stables — 'it's all right, Monsieur, he hasn't any, besides he's just had a bath with Condy's' — even the silkworms George had acquired from a gardener's son — 'if you have the window open, Darcy, put them under the rug because they don't like the cold, and Darcy — Darcy, don't let any one sit on them!'

CHAPTER XIII

MORNING, NOON, AND NIGHT

1

VALMONT could not get used to the English idea of breakfast, he was hopelessly depressed by that pitilessly solid hot-plated array on the sideboard. And their contents, chops, bacon, kidneys; why not beefsteak? It was conceivable. The only advantage of it was that it allowed him to suit his breakfast hour to his conscience, and that complaisant organ generally permitted him to come down at least late enough to escape his host, who not only breakfasted at an eccentrically early hour but actually spent some time before it in riding. With all day to ride in, if he pleased, the man chose to do it at the crack of dawn on an empty stomach. It was, however, merely one more riddle produced by this country of unreasonable contradictions, a country which opposed an imperturbable barrier to the comprehensions of the foreigner of logical mind. The country of comfort — and le sport; which encourages that curiosity, the S.P.C.A., hunts the fox and shoots the pheasant, abolishes certain time-honoured forms of humour, forms up in cheerful lightly-clad queues for a bath, and lives in happy community with dogs and horses. In a word the unreadable riddle of a great barbarian industrial community clinging reverently to the relics of a savage and war-like past and yet containing within itself the contradiction of all these things. Factory system and antiquarianism, cruelty and sentimentality, parliamentary

government and le squire, plenty of servants and help yourself to breakfast. The logical mind can only give it up.

Always he found himself in the company of Bess, who possessed a conscience as serviceable as his own. It seemed to him that some one's (or any one's — there, in fact, appeared to be no *one* in particular) confidence in her or in him was immense, misplaced, unjustifiable, and in some way not very complimentary to himself. The fact was that he had not even been considered a possibility. It was unfortunate that his experience at his girls' school had left him with a feeling that he was for ever to be incapable of looking at any woman under thirty. Girls, English ones at least, were unconditionally devils. It was true that Bess was not of the type of his principal tormentors. She was undoubtedly a very nice girl and there might be persons to whom that phrase might appeal with other than a derogatory sense, but he was no longer one of them. He would have to sketch her, that was enough; he could not expect himself (even for his own sake) to do any more for her. And yet she might, by another, be considered pretty; small, slight, neat hands and feet, with a graceful neck and a head perhaps a little overbalanced by a great quantity of really quite beautiful fair hair, amiable blue eyes, straight nose, exceedingly fair, rather colourless complexion, and a mouth that could readily be described as tiny, whose small square child teeth came lightly to a point in front — not as in so many pointed jaws with two flat teeth in front. The point of the point appeared exactly in the line between these two, the rather thin upper lip came to its shapely little companion point directly above and, projecting slightly over the lower, en profile, it gave her a softly fish-like aspect that was not unattractive. For the lines of the lower part of her

face, the modelling, softened towards and about the chin. That, it is true, did not recede, nor did the teeth project, but one was inclined to say, 'How fortunate.' One degree more, two degrees, and — but as it was it gave her a certain air of delicacy, ce charme enfantin that had so violently ceased to appeal to Valmont. He found her too apt to be round-eyed. The best features of the face were the eyebrows that might so easily have been light. Not only, however, did they avoid that pitfall, they swept up a delicious curve to break at the peak, throwing up a tiny crest of perhaps half a score impudent free hairs (like the charming tuft that graces the ear of the lynx) and thence completed their admirable curve. They made her possible to the pencil, they lent her face a promise of piquant charm that was not, on further acquaintance, fulfilled. She was completely anodyne, what was the word — inoffensive. Valmont, man of experience, wondered how it was, in this winter weather, that she had no cold.

They were all scandalously late, not only they but Charles, generally the exemplar of slightly better things. And Valmont was engaged, under difficulties, in being a credit to his country over tea that had stood and cool spongy toast, while Charles absorbed incredible quantities of porridge in silence and in a very appropriate spirit of gloom. After a decent interval Bess resumed the conversation Valmont's advent must have interrupted: 'You ought not to let him do it, it's bad for him, he isn't strong enough.' Charles only looked at her in such haggard, silent, not-before-strangers entreaty that one must pity him, but, Bess's attention having been drawn to Valmont, she promptly appealed to him. 'You don't think he ought to, do you, Monsieur?'

Charles returned to his porridge as one who should drown his sorrows with strong drink.

'Who should not do what, Mademoiselle?' asked Valmont politely.

'Oh... it's Darcy,' Bess explained, 'he's not a bit well really. It seems that he's been sleeping badly for more than a week.'

'Hasn't been sleeping at all,' Charles gruffly corrected into his porridge, rashly providing her with new confirmation.

'You see,' accusingly, 'he ought not to have a rehearsal to-day, but he will do it. Somebody ought to stop him.'

Charles, having made one mistake, was obviously preparing to maintain a dogged silence, but he was jerked out of it by the force of her next remark. 'He ought to see the doctor.'

'He doesn't *want* to.' It was, for Charles, a small explosion. He was, in fact, much less good-natured than one had ever hoped to see him. Valmont lent himself to the scene with more and more interest.

'I don't care, he ought. And what's more I told Dad so too.'

'You what?' cried Anne, incredulous, and Valmont noticed with surprise that she had added herself to the group.

'I told him,' said Bess, with spirit, 'all about it — in this room — this morning. And he went straight upstairs to see Darcy.'

Charles giving every evidence of acute feeling pushed back his chair violently, loomed hesitating whether or not to speak, then dashed his napkin down on the table and left the room in silence.

'Now you've done it.' Anne was cheerily tactless.

'I'm sure I don't know why he should take it like that,' said Bess, very bright-eyed. 'You'd think he didn't care... his own brother.'

'Care!' said Anne scornfully. 'He's only upset because Darcy'll be furious about being given away.'

'But if it isn't good for him, why will he let ——'.

'Good for him, what does that matter? Charles'd give him his head if he thought he wanted it. All he knows is that Darcy says he's not to see the doctor, so he's *not* to see the doctor. And so he gives him away to you and you give him away to Dad, to *Dad*,' with cutting severity, 'and Darcy'll be in a Holy State about it, that's all.' Her exposition concluded, Anne turned an experimental eye on the sideboard. 'Don't you want that bacon, Monsieur?'

'I suppose you've already had Darcy's,' from Bess disapprovingly.

'No,' calmly, 'George had that.'

'Oh, not your fingers!' Bess protested in horrified expectation.

'If asparagus, why not bacon?' Valmont admired her logic, the firmness of her throat, the turn of her arm and the efficacy of her excellent teeth, and reflected on the vigour of an organism that could consume cold bacon at this hour of the morning.

'All the same,' Bess went back to her former argument, 'if he won't look after himself and no one looks after him—'

'Look after him!' Anne had finished the bacon and was seemingly in two steps beside the window, which she threw up, letting in floods of damp congealing air. 'What d'you think Charles was doing in his room all last night (not that he does much good), what was Tony doing in the North-West Corridor at two o'clock this morning, how much sleep do you think either of them has had lately, why did Charles look like a needle that's been lost in a haystack? The trouble with you,' Anne threw a leg over the low window-sill, 'is that you sleep

too well.' On the edge she turned back to say, 'A good way to look after people, making them do what they don't want to! Here, you, Jim, I told you to wait for me!'

'I really do not know what to do with her,' Bess confided with a sigh, 'her manners are awful, and the boys only encourage her...'

Valmont silently conjectured Anne's probably violent reaction to the idea of Bess's doing anything with her, and marked with appreciation that she had not said what she herself had been doing in the North-West Corridor at that hour; he reflected pleasurably on the prospect of seeing Darcy in a Holy State, whatever that was, and it did not escape him that in the elucidation of that mysterious phrase lay also the possibility of the elucidation of the character of Darcy. For Valmont had begun to expend some thought on a personality that was so little manifest yet so obviously a personality. One would not have supposed that any one could talk so much and say so little about himself.

He went up as soon as he could get away; he had missed enough already; after all it was not intrusion, a man must go to his work. He entered the room with the liveliest expectations, but the scene he encountered could hardly be described as dramatic. Neither did his entrance interrupt what was passing there. M. Darcy (still here!) nodded to him absently, Darcy intent on his uncle, and Charles, in silent misery on the window-seat, overlooked him entirely. Valmont, discreetly arranging himself to work, took in the clinical thermometer and other evidences of physical examination, M. Darcy's unquestionably effective air of authority, and Darcy's disappointing lack of any sign of disturbance, until by a slight turn of the head one caught sight of the eyes. He had the savage there well in

leash but if he was to let him go, what a magnificent sight!

'Very well, then,' said M. Darcy abruptly, 'as long as you don't get too tired.'

'How can you sleep if you're *not*.' But as his uncle was in the act of leaving the room he probably did not hear this illuminating sotto voce. He knows that he must exhaust himself or he cannot, Valmont thought with a certain compassion, but he hardened his heart as Charles rose to follow his uncle. Charles had had no opportunity to make his peace. Things were not so bad as they might well have been; his uncle had not forbidden the rehearsal but only at the price of endless talk.... Valmont knew quite well that it was he that was driving Charles out with judgment suspended over him; but believe that he was to be baulked of his light-giving scene!

'If you please,' he indicated the model's chair, 'we have not yet had our sitting I think. You are so occupied. I am lucky to have caught you. No?'

'*No*,' said Charles's whole attitude unmistakably, but while he slowly fumbled for an excuse, Valmont had him seated, trussed for the sacrifice, having placed him, with an apologetic reference to light but in reality with a devilish ingenuity, with his back to his brother and in a line with him, so that both their faces were discovered to his investigating eye. That this position would be very unfavourable to Charles, still in suspense and deprived of even what help he might have drawn from a study of Darcy's expression, Valmont was fully aware; but some one must suffer in the cause of art. 'Now, my friends, you will show me what your imperturbable islanders are made of,' he said to himself with a certain exultation. The thing was, in its way, a scientific demonstration. The best course, indeed the only one for

Charles, was silence, but Valmont did not know himself if he had not sufficient address to prevent that. Charles was nothing in his hands. He was, though obviously unwilling and not very comfortable, not undignified as he accepted his inevitable capture. For an instant Valmont doubted his resources against this formidable stolidity. Charles serious and waiting was at his best; it was when he smiled, smiling as he did with a straight upper lip, that he had that air embarrassed, indescribably gêné, that might have led one to underestimate... if one had not known, one could not have told. Valmont, stopping to choose his opening with more care, found Darcy before him. 'Didn't you say,' carelessly, 'that you wanted to hear some of the "Cinna"? Remember your bit, Charlot?'

'I could do the fifth act, I think.'

'You'll excuse the inevitable,' Darcy was politely deprecating, 'alors c'est à moi. Ready? Prends un siège, Cinna, prends, et sur tout chose observe la loi que je t'impose...'

And Valmont's elaborate arrangements went down in ruin, while one of the most hackneyed scenes of the world's stage proceeded decorously, Corneille's magnificent rhetoric flowing incongruously through English lips. It was all so simple that one might have supposed it unpremeditated, unconscious, if one could have supposed it a natural act for one suffering from suppressed anger. But nothing could make it natural. It was a superb instance of quick-thinking, bold, adroit, and unshakable in its simplicity. So, said Valmont to himself, half annoyed, half amused and not without some admiration, the little brother must not be tormented, eh? Well, that is curious. He offends, but one must not touch the family, is that it? Keep it up, little one, protect him, but that scene is not so long as you wish it was.

For unless they could keep it up until some one came or until the rehearsal set last night for half-past eleven, they were still in his hands; though the first and most poignantly revealing moment had been snatched from him and his chance of future success would depend on whether Darcy's temper was of the kind that subsides under repression, or of the kind that rages with an added fury under compression until it must find an outlet. And in Valmont's judgment of Darcy the chances were fair for his success. He was not so certain when Darcy, at the end of the scene said swiftly and unblushingly, 'Take Livie and Maxime and I'll do the others.'

The scene progressed very creditably: there was nothing the matter with Charles's memory, and Darcy, with a fair attempt at the declamation of French verse, that hinted at instruction somewhere, proved that he could, at least while using another's words, be magnanimous with some distinction. Valmont enjoyed the irony in their performance of the great classic example of clemency, with Charles so intimately fitted for the part of Cinna. And Darcy for Auguste? 'Que vous dirai-je après que nos offences, Au lieu de châtiments trouvent des récompenses?' Admirable. 'Soyons amis, Cinna, c'est moi qui t'en convie,' and 'Auguste a tout appris and veut tout oublier....' Excellent, but what were their real thoughts?

So they continued to the end of the act without — to Valmont who did not pretend to verbal knowledge of it — obvious break or omission to mar their prosody, with only, near the end, an abrupt interjection from Darcy — 'Say it in a more self-respecting tone!'

Without waiting for Valmont's suave acknowledgments, Darcy recurred to the incident and more pacifically. 'You see, Charlot, it isn't as though the man that wrote it thought that there was anything dishonourable

in knocking under completely to the king, even in things we wouldn't stand now, any more than a soldier taking orders. At least I think so.'

'I agree with you,' said Valmont, and with a random effort of memory quoted approximately from a compatriot once well known to him. 'A curious point of view to us nowadays.'

'I should think so,' said Charles, in disgust.

'That's old,' Darcy's attention was riveted. 'Older than the play?'

'Montaigne.'

'I suppose that ought to mean something, but I'm sorry ——'

'Oh... late sixteenth century. You'll find an earlier version of your speech there, probably from Plutarch ultimately. I never inquired so far myself. I should try Montaigne, if I were you. That is if you are interested in points of view.'

'He collects them,' said Charles unwarily, and then so obviously the knowledge of his error and rashness was written on his countenance, that Valmont could hardly command his own. Charles had so evidently (and again!) betrayed a confidence and, probably, a recent one, his own appreciation of the novelty of this queer hobby was so fresh and the pride that he took in Darcy's originality so apparent. And, if recent, à propos of what had that confidence been given? Valmont counted it as certain that the point of view recently collected must have been his own. It was true that he had provided plenty of material. Charles had, indeed, involved himself, and to a depth! He had succeeded in betraying a confidence and, by implication, more than that, to the subject of that confidence, in the presence of the confider, who was, one should judge, one of the last to forgive such a niaiserie. With feelings almost of triumph,

Valmont stole a slantwise glance at his ultimate victim, who must be near the end of his patience, never, probably, with him, a commodity present in any very great, or inexhaustible, quantity. There was no doubt that Darcy knew what inference Valmont must draw from this slip of Charles's, long before Charles himself did; indeed, one could see that that was only now dawning on *him* as an added possibility of horror. Valmont was not going to conceal the fact that he had drawn it; rather he meant to allow it to appear unmistakably. He was eminently well satisfied; it was far more than he had expected; Charles had played into his hands, nullified Darcy's efforts, forfeited all claim to his brother's protective activities, and saved Valmont's scheme from total ruin. Involuntarily one looked at the clock to see how much longer it would be before they must come to interrupt.

Darcy, however, confounded him by remaining on the original, or further, shore of the conversation: 'It may seem curious to us,' he was proceeding safely, 'but it explains a lot of things. Most of the parts of the plays, in fact, that it's hard for us to swallow. And you can see how well it would act, if you were writing, as you can see that he must have done, to get certain effects, and the people simply must or must not do certain things in order to work up to his climaxes, you can see how useful it must be, to him, to have an accepted point of view, like that, to explain their doing or not doing them. Very useful, you can see that because he uses it all the time.'

'And very useful as flattery,' said Valmont drily. 'He was, certainly, not above that, you know.'

'And then,' said Darcy thoughtfully, 'his point of view died out.' It was, he pointed out, distinctly bad luck, for an author to have that happen to him.

'Perhaps. Yet I agree with your brother,' deliberately, cruelly, he drew Charles forth from his welcomed obscurity, with diminished hope casting his shrinking form at his brother's feet, 'that that is a point of view, we do well without, to-day.'

'We do without it, all right,' said Darcy, unblinking. 'I, at least, never saw a trace of it, in the people we lived with.' He dropped into easy French and a swift flow of anecdotal reminiscence, at first designed to illustrate traits of republicanism or even of cheery disregard and independence of all law, met with by him in his early unconventional environment, but passing imperceptibly, by way of, 'D'you remember, Charlot,' and 'Who was it that lived...' into a resuscitation of childish exploits and enjoyments. Valmont was forced to recognize that he was finally defeated.

And yet — if Darcy had set out to show him what power he held over Charles, how easily he could set him back in his chair in comfort, he could hardly have done it more thoroughly. Was it no evidence, no light on his character that he should choose unhesitatingly to overlook offences, that one had been given clearly to understand were not light offences — and that they were forgiven, not relegated to a more convenient season, Charles's relaxation and relief was silent witness, and that for no reason that one could see but that it was impossible to notice them in the presence of a stranger.

Was it that all this was a necessary rebuke to an interfering stranger?

Valmont was in danger of knowing more of these imperturbable islanders than he liked. Was he to be made to digest an adroitly administered rebuke, and by a boy of eighteen? Stung by the shocking possibility of the suspicion, Valmont turned on this incautiously selected subject of experiment, hot with potential indignation,

only to encounter from Darcy that glance of freemasonry universally exchanged by those who are fortunate enough to share the sight of a fellow-creature asleep. For Charles could no longer hold up his head; with his mind relieved and nerves unbound, he had surrendered at discretion to a body, unused to long waking nights, and was now helplessly and, for him, incongruously (for Charles was not, except by inadvertence, confiding), confidingly asleep where he sat. The sight was irresistible. Valmont, laughing silently, congratulated himself; Darcy was innocent, credited with knowledge that could not possibly be his. What reason had he to suppose that an outsider would have any inkling of their affair? He could have found him no more than inopportune. Valmont was very glad of it; one hoped that Darcy would, indeed, never learn, though, if it depended on Charles or Bess to conceal his — at least, his *assistance* at the earlier scene, there was little to depend on.

'How are you getting on?' Darcy's tone was suitably flattened to avoid disturbing Charles. Valmont gathered up his sheaves, rather meagre-looking to the uninitiate eye, consisting of the scant outlines of Jim and Tony, if one had not seen the painstaking, the great preparatory labour of sketching, elimination, and reduction to essentials. For Jim, Darcy had: 'Oh, that's jolly good!' but over Tony he hesitated, frowning, in a painful effort to find words, to collect thoughts that were, it was clear, so scattered that he could not, at first, at all bend them to the consideration he required of them. Valmont was shocked. Charles had not, it seemed, been exaggerating. He must be abominably tired to strain so wearily after a simple comment. Luckily, by the incursion of the first rehearsalists comment was made unnecessary.

First Jean, then Bess and George, Tony, with Anne, a straggler, and Jim still (ten minutes hence) to come. The room was immediately in a bustle, Charles coming to life with the comically defiant air of one caught in the act.

'Don't climb all over Darcy, children,' said Bess warningly. 'We don't want to be too much for him, do we?' Jean, in silence, achieved his usual position of vantage, but there was a singularly obstinate look about the back of his neck, while the accuracy and precision of his manœuvre indicated (though not to Bess) resentment and a desire to be deliberately insulting; and George, checking anxiously, found his balance upset, by an urgent hand of Darcy's, and collapsed heavily, breathlessly mirthful, delightedly apprehensive, upon a part (a little below the chest) of his host's person, that one might have supposed least fitted to receive him conveniently. Anne met Valmont's eye, with a left eyelid that, estimably, just did not flicker, proving that she too appreciated the fact, which Valmont was only that moment revolving mentally, that Darcy, with admirable justice, had reserved the full force of his resentment for the person who had, after all, done the most to deserve it. A thing rare in human relationships, and the more remarkable, that he had reserved it, when, under the circumstances, it could not be expressed; one could see him, almost obviously, regretting that it was a girl. He had denied himself a most presentable scapegoat.

With Darcy in a temper that was in abeyance but not in the least abated, Charles anxiously careful but, by nature, unlucky, Anne impish and Bess unconscious of everything, the rehearsal promised well; but Valmont had learned enough by his morning's experience not to doubt that they would, somehow, stumble through it with all the conventions preserved — all, that is, that

did not encumber Mademoiselle Anne. And so they did, to the last act, with Darcy no more than formal over his prompt-book, with Bess serenely not knowing her words, with Charles, in spite of heroic efforts, totally unable to act, and Tony not very much less so. And in the end it was Tony who precipitated the previously despaired-of crisis. 'This naughty man, Shall face to face be brought,' he began mildly ——

'You little idiot,' Jim burst out at him. 'What do you think he'd been doing, stealing jam? "This naughty man,"' he mimicked the tone mercilessly. 'What do you think you're doing — acting?'

Instantly Darcy's hand shot out, weighted by the prompt-book. 'Perhaps you'd like to take the rest of it,' he said, with freezing curtness, and Jim remaining, for an instant, pulled up short and taken aback, Darcy tossed the book to him. It was evidently intended and generally felt to be a crushing rebuke and Jim was far from receiving it meekly. Clutching the book, which he had caught tant bien que mal, he — fondait was the only word one could find to express it, in a torrent of fury upon Darcy, a fury that was as violent as it was sudden, and, to one observer at least, unexpected. They were very much alike as they faced one another, diamond cut diamond as to temper, yet Darcy's, surely, had the gathered force of repression. And curiously one's attention was drawn, not to Jim, in magnificent eruption, but to Darcy, in, as one imagined, the dead heart of the cyclone, the only sign of tension about him the clenched hand, rigid behind him, that lifted him a little on his pillows.

... 'I'm sick of your beastly favoritism, I'm done... D'you think I'll go on doing nothing but fall over your mangy little pets from morning till night! Dear little Tony's an actor, isn't he?' with biting scorn. 'Must

have a decent part, mustn't he! And no one can say a word about him, he's clever. Oh, yes, we all know it... Darcy's little genius, always having to be hauled in (by his slacks) for praise because he knows his A B C — and precious little else! And Darcy's little angel. Sweet-tempered, unselfish little brute! He's too good to play the Bastard, isn't he — you'll play it yourself first!'

Darcy, for the first time, stirred from his ominous stillness, to make a sketchy, quickly suppressed movement of the free hand, as if he would, for a second, have interrupted.... 'That's right,' Jim flung at him, hotly, 'talk with your hands, why don't you — like a damned greasy little Jew — or a foreigner!'

This dropped into an air that lay heavy with the consternation of the whole assistance, burdened with the difficulty, felt by each one of them, not to look as if they were not looking. For, not only was the association of ideas evident and unfortunate, but, in addition, Valmont was rather of that type of Frenchman that somehow causes those of other nationalities to wonder a little uneasily and to choose their words, for it would never do to fall into possibly unfelicitous references....

'You can go on — after you've apologized for that,' said Darcy very quietly.

'Then you'll do without me,' replied Jim, through white lips.

'Shut the door as you go, then. And don't forget the penalty for swearing.'

Jim, finding, as by discovery, the book in his hand, with a sort of passionate reflex action swung it up and threw it, with all his strength, at his brother's head, and, without waiting to register a hit, slammed the door behind him, almost in the same breath. The book, taking Darcy in the elbow of the arm he had thrown up to protect his face, dribbled down onto the couch, a safe

and unresentful target for unoccupied eyes. Darcy picked it up, waggled the back experimentally, satisfied himself as to the binding, and said, calmly, 'I'll take Claudio. Get on, Tony.'

Once more Tony began wretchedly: 'This naughty man, Shall face to face...' What they might have been tempted to do or to say, given the absence of a stranger, Valmont could not guess. What they did was to display a certain eagerness to escape from the scene of the outrage as soon as the Act was ended. Even to Bess, it seemed, there was nothing to do about the whole affair but ignore it: 'Come along, children,' she cried cheerfully. 'Lunch! It will be getting cold!' Charles had already left the room, something about his back purposeful and inauspicious.

'I'm not children,' Jean rebelled. 'And neither's George. None of us are.' George was prudently silent on the disputed point.

'Why, but Jean, of course you are...' and Bess reasonably pursued his invincible silence with arguments maddeningly 'suited' to his comprehension as she followed him out.

'Oh, Monsieur, I'm sorry.' Anne alone had spent a morning of unalloyed enjoyment. 'I forgot to thank you this morning. It was very nice of you to let me have it.'

'You are right, Mademoiselle,' said Valmont gravely. 'The sacrifice was not prescribed.'

'Well, I suppose it's luncheon...'

'Bon profit,' said Valmont, not without hope.

2

Tony lingered to attend to a: 'Here, see if you can do something with these wretched pillows.... Oh, all in the wrong places...' Valmont reflected that he was hav-

ing enough practice to-day in being in the way and enough to stir the imagination in the unimaginable conversations that might have taken place, if he had not been, while he closed his consciousness as much as possible to the murmur of voices there, where Tony, bending over, was dealing with pillows and a back with surprising gentleness and skill. And in fact what Tony said he did not hear, but Darcy: 'Don't you worry your head about him. He's all right. Do him good.... No, perfectly *not*.... Cut along now, and, if you like, send him up to me later. I'll pick up the pieces, that is, if Charlot's left any...'

'It is unfortunate,' said Valmont, after Tony had 'cut along,' 'that, by our arrangements, I have no alternative but to invade your privacy. Not only that, but even for meals I must inflict myself upon you. I feel it, mon cher, I assure you. And that by my position I even overhear.'

'I meant you to,' said Darcy curtly. 'Do you think we whisper in corners?' He was racked by a tremendous yawn, through which he mumbled, 'If I wanted you to go I'd tell you so. I'm not so comblé with people to talk sense with that I'd — uh — be likely to complain of your company. Sounds rather off, that. It was meant as a sort of compliment really. But they don't flow to-day. Sorry.'

'You must be exhausted,' said Valmont sympathetically. But Darcy would not have it: 'Oh, there's nothing the matter with me but my temper and that's improving.' He chuckled suddenly: 'But it's a wonder that I'm not a maddened wreck. People going about in squadrons all night trying to *do* something for you.... And dear old Charles with the tread of an elephant.... By morning I could have bitten any one.'

Valmont found him extraordinary, with some amuse-

ment. 'It must have been very irritating,' he said safely.

'Oh, appalling. Good souls, with the best intentions, trying to help.... I hate people messing about.' Another yawn caught him. 'Pardon.... I suppose it may do some people good to keep their tempers, but it always seems to me that, unless you lose it when it's convenient, you're sure to lose it later, when it's inconvenient.'

'Exactly,' said Valmont to himself, 'the temperament I was crediting you with, but what has become of it?' He risked, 'I thought your self-control marvellous.'

Darcy laughed. 'And me hanging on by the eyelids, until Jim came to the rescue!'

'Rescue!' There was no need for Valmont to act surprise, he felt it.

'Haven't you ever noticed,' said Darcy thoughtfully, 'that, if you're in a bate, yourself, privately that is, before you've let it out (after's no use) and some one else comes along and goes to market, properly (Valmont disengaged the essential meaning of these terms somewhat hazily), doesn't matter what about, it takes it out of you. A sort of vicarious lightning. I've often noticed it, myself, when I've been feeling cursed.... It always works. Heaven knows why; I suppose you say to yourself: well, at least, I've not lost myself to that extent. And then, somehow or another, you haven't.'

'It might be a good idea,' Valmont suggested, 'to organize it. Lightning insurance, eh?'

Darcy looked at him, queerly. 'You think that justifiable?'

It was the most confused and incomprehensible moment of a confused and incomprehensible morning, this, carrying the hint of tortuous and devious spiritual ways, a hint that became absurd the next second and Valmont dismissed the idea gladly as the product of an imagina-

tion, fed only on the unfamiliar, the undigestible, the foreign. This was, this must be, only a case of the Englishman, uncertain, wondering if the Frenchman would be capable of doing it, as well as of suggesting it. For nothing, Valmont reflected, is so tenuous or so easily ruined as an international raillery. One finds, suddenly, one's wildest statements received with a simple trust, and the unflattering conviction that one's oddly constituted nation is capable of anything. Upon which, one's temper, if not angelic, suffered.... Valmont's was not angelic and, wisely, he was determined to put no undue strain upon it. He turned the subject, lightly, with a laugh; and Darcy, too, after recurring to Jim's faux pas, to laugh over it, was silent as he lay, looking distinctly more easy, on his lowered pillows, eating little or nothing it was true, yet, oddly enough, he did appear, in some mysterious way to have gained in comfort by that scene.

As to Jim, Valmont found that attitude curious enough to ponder over. How to define it... Needless to say, after their unrestricted flow of opinion (unrestricted on one side, at any rate), Darcy knew, as well as he knew himself, that he was a non-practising Catholic of the first water, and not without a trace of characteristic Gallic Anti-Semitism. A fact, that, to Darcy, appeared to add joy to an odd situation, a singular point of view. As far as one could make it out, it seemed, in essence, that the fact of Jim's being capable of such a lapse into idiocy, of falling into so complete a betrayal of opinions that no one could contemplate exposing to the person concerned, for one could not doubt that Jim had forgotten the 'stranger,' this fact, alone, made Jim, automatically, so ridiculous that there was nothing left to do but to enjoy the sight of his gigantic ineptitude. Accordingly Darcy, accepting no responsibility, for who

can be responsible for an Act of God? called upon Valmont to admire Jim, as a specimen of the truly ludicrous. One felt that Darcy, in assuming that the feelings of the victim were the same as his own, was, in a sense, paying him a compliment; nevertheless Valmont did not feel himself quite equal to rising to such impersonal heights, but the assumption that he was capable of it was not an unflattering one. He found the point of view noteworthy: what stability it implied, what security! Carried to its logical conclusion, it amounted to a total rejection of public opinion. It was, supposing him to be capable of entertaining it where he himself was in question, not that of vanity or pettiness, yet — extravagant. One felt that, in the balance of his qualities, there was danger of his judgment being outweighed by his peculiar sense of humour.

Lunch being carried away, Valmont, in a peaceful hiatus of labour over a cigarette, meditated: an unprofitable morning — sensibly the better for lunch (a mistake to eat too little breakfast, in this climate) — experiment a failure, he had been too subtle for his man. What then? Adopt their own methods. Cross-examination. The redoubtable English point-blank question; if you want to know — ask!

Darcy, after an instant's hesitation, had produced, how one hardly knew, a cigarette of his own and, smoking, eyes shut, smoke issuing sparingly through thin nostrils as if he was straining from it every aërial ounce of pleasure, had wrapped himself, as if in a mantle, in contentment and satisfaction. 'You have needed that,' said Valmont to himself, not without sympathy, 'but why wait all the morning': 'I did not know that you were a fellow-worshipper,' he ventured aloud.

'Don't give me away,' Darcy murmured, without stirring an eyelash.

'Ah, the doctor forbids, eh?'

Doctors, Darcy pointed out, spent their lives finding out what people liked and then forbidding them to do it. Wise men, on the other hand, kept their likes to themselves. They did not know what the doctor said, nor want to know.

'And your uncle?'

'He! He'd as soon expect to find George doing it. He thinks I'm a cross between a child of nine and a piece of extra-breakable china.'

'Do you have any difficulty in keeping yourself supplied?'

'Difficulty!'

'You must do me the honour to join me, then. When we are alone, entendu?'

'Will I!' said Darcy fervently.

It seemed an excellent moment and, after a decent interval: 'And yet,' cautiously he sent out a feeler, 'I do not understand...'

'Understand what?' Darcy was completely amiable and accessible to these tactics.

'Your action was simple. I confess that I do not see in it anything to infuriate, not enough ——'

'Oh... Jim,' said Darcy easily. 'Anything's enough, if you're jealous.'

'Ah, jealousy?' Valmont was discreetly profound in accent.

'Little devil's as jealous as a magpie — luckily. It makes him easier to handle.'

'A difficult subject,' Valmont suggested.

'Not difficult exactly... Oh, I don't know.... I suppose there are always people you feel more comfortable about if you've got some sort of a hold on them.'

'You may have unexpected results if you try to use

that madness; you know they say it is true that it is a form of insanity.'

'Does him no harm,' said Darcy carelessly, 'to touch him up a bit. It helps him to digest his meals. Take his mind off himself, now and then.'

'You have been jealous yourself?' Valmont hinted.

'Oh, Lord, no. What of? Why should I?' said Darcy, with unmistakable sincerity.

'You do not know what you are doing,' said Valmont, but he said it to himself, 'with a type both jealous and vain!' How well that explained the surprising promptness and violence of Jim's outburst. That was not the product of a day.

...'Besides,' said Darcy decisively, evidently at the end of an unexplained train of thought, 'he's got to have something.' He endeavoured to explain, to Valmont's lifted eyebrows, 'Something outside himself.'

Valmont selected the comforting generalization: 'After all it is not always stolidity that counts — even in England.'

Darcy took the implication of weakness à souhait, 'It's not that. He has a mind of his own. And as much sense as you'd expect at his age. And as good judgment as most people. It's just that — given circumstances — I'd know what Charles would do, or Tony, I'd even,' with a deprecatory grin, 'be able to guess what I'd do myself, but God knows what Jim would do. Let alone him knowing!'

'You must not be too hard upon him. At his age!'

'I'm not.' Darcy was suitably goaded. 'It's only that some people get along better, in the end, if they have something behind them.'

'Ah,' said Valmont sapiently, 'something. Say rather some one. You, for instance.'

'Me,' said Darcy rather grimly, 'while he's in this

room, but I don't flatter myself that, when I'm out of sight, I'm much in his mind. Jim's all right but you have to hold his interest. And, when you realize that, to do that, you have to compete against himself, you'll understand that the competition is tremendous.'

'Then,' said Valmont reflectively, 'it will be for your good Charlot.'

'Oh... he rags him, now and then, for his own good, but it doesn't *do* much good. Charles is good at things, mostly. Rather too heavy-handed for Jim.'

'That makes it difficult,' Valmont allowed himself to sympathize. 'He gets away from you and ——'

'He doesn't get away, perceptibly, from Tony,' Darcy laughed at his astonishment. 'Look,' he indicated the sketch of Tony that Valmont had left on the shelf under the table, 'you have that wrong. He is not stupid, like that!'

'But he!' Valmont protested. 'The other ridicules, crushes him.'

'D'you think he'd bother, so elaborately, to stamp out every idea Tony ever produces, if he didn't feel that Tony *had* him? Tony, of course, has no idea, but he's the principal in this. I,' said Darcy, largely, 'I'm only an auxiliary — emergency. Give me that,' he handled the sketch without reverence. 'So that is why you tell me all this,' thought Valmont, amused, 'I, who thought I was drawing you ——' 'You see, this is what you have not got. This —— he may be slow but he has generally got some idea of what's in the other fellow's mind. (A thing Charles'll never have.) And, as for Jim, being practically the same age, he knows him like — well — Jim will never get away from him. He's always there, standing for —— Jim knows all about that.'

'What good, then,' Valmont risked the question, 'to make him jealous?'

'Oh, *that*. It's not serious. Only enough to make Jim respect him; makes him wonder, now and then, if there isn't more in Tony than meets the eye. It does him a lot of good. It's between Jim and the child, really. Jean, you see, believes in monopoly (for Jean), and Jim believes in monopoly, too (for Jim), and, as far as they're concerned, Tony's neither here nor there.'

'And you ——' Valmont watched, with interest, the very perceptible shade that fell on his face, ordinarily so little changing, and the slight hesitation before he answered. But, contrary to his expectation, Darcy did not try to evade the question. Having let himself lead to a point where the question was permissible: 'I make capital of it,' he said harshly. 'And hate it and yourself, for doing it,' Valmont deduced from the tone. He was more and more interested, but Darcy's complete frankness made it (perhaps intentionally) impossible to go any further. Obviously, he would not talk about himself, even direct questioning brought one only to a blank wall of, possibly, direct refusal. The only thing to do was to make him talk about the others; he was not yet practised enough not to say, there, more than he intended.

'It is possible,' Valmont rescued his sketch, he had no wish to see it destroyed before his eyes, and Darcy, in his evident dislike of it, was absentmindedly rolling and unrolling it, 'that I have overlooked the better points of my subject, but I do not feel that I have been entirely superficial.'

'No,' said Darcy quickly, 'that — it's rather good in that way. Most people wouldn't have noticed; but you suggest it's a weakness. It isn't. Tony's a rock. Charles has ability, of a sort, he'll be a success — you know the kind. And Jim will always be popular. But Tony's worth all the rest of us put together.

He's the only person I've seen that's, almost naturally, good.'

'That,' said Valmont promptly, 'is a remark one can make only of another, not being sufficiently blessed with the ignorance to make it of ourselves.'

'Meaning that I don't know Tony well enough,' Darcy was as warmly indignant as one could have wished to see him. 'As a matter of fact, he can do without the almost. I only put it in because I hate exaggeration...'

'If you do,' Valmont commented silently, 'it is only the verbal variety.'

...'He is quite naturally good. I haven't got any blessed ignorance of him, either. And, if you want to know how I know, it's because we're so much alike that, what there is of me, that's any good, is Tony. Tony's me — without the devil.'

'Have you one?' Valmont laughed, very well satisfied.

'Legions.' Darcy, after another instant's hesitation, found it, as one might have hoped, a statement that called for some sort of explanation. 'Do you know what it is like to feel as if you were about a million people at once, all different? Safe enough inside you, but as if, some day, they might get out and shock the populace. And yet,' thoughtfully, 'on some days, you feel empty, and soundless and clear, as if there was nothing there but a pane of glass.'

'That must be agreeable,' said Valmont, smiling.

'It is not,' said Darcy abruptly. 'C'est désolant.'

'It is nothing. You are young.' Valmont said it with a suitable melancholy. 'I know that. I have been young once, myself.'

Darcy, with infinite bad taste, allowing himself to laugh, openly, Valmont seized the moment to slip under

his guard: 'Eh, bien, Charles is the family ability, Jim the popularity, Tony the worth, what are you, then?'

'The brains.' Darcy laughed, once more, in his face, and confided to a non-existent audience, 'He thought I was going to be modest. Oh, la — la!' The imitation was excellent. Valmont called him a little grey devil, with some irritation that did not prevent him from carrying his questionnaire to its enlightening conclusion, 'And the youngest, one must confess that he eludes...'

'Can it be,' said Darcy softly, 'that he does not confide...' His tone conveyed elaborately burlesque respect. 'H'm, the youngest, well, in the tales the youngest son's always something special, isn't he?' He broke off, 'I say, do you mind ——' he was almost embarrassed. Valmont looked up surprised by his change of tone. 'Can you work somewhere else for a bit?'

'You are tired!' Valmont was startled. It was true that he, like every one else, had been pitiless in his demands on strength that must be, all too readily, exhausted.

'It's not that. Only — Jim will be up. I shall be magnanimous — forgive him for making the scene I stirred him up to make. I do that better without an audience, I believe.' Valmont was astonished by the weary self-condemning bitterness of his voice. 'Thank you...'

'You do not have to thank me for the use of your own room,' said Valmont concisely. 'And if you will allow me to advise you, after this operation, I should rest.'

'Thanks, I shall.' Darcy followed him to the door with the parting shot. 'I feel quite sleepy already, thanks to your soothing conversation.'

As Valmont went out, Jim stood aside sulkily to let

him pass, he seemed whole enough; shattering power of Charles not great, evidently.

'Oh, Monsieur,' Jim stopped him, saying hastily: 'Of course, it's all right for foreigners, but in this country Jews *are* the only people who use their hands. I wasn't — I didn't mean...'

'I understand,' said Valmont coldly. He did not possess the charity to suffer with patience a second time the denigratory 'foreigner.' 'You can tell him that you have satisfied me.' Feeling all the insolence of this bizarre idea of an apology, he saw, with some pleasure, Jim's backward step and enjoyed his crimson and furious confusion, saw him turn away without another word, and heard the door close on his, 'Darcy, why didn't you tell me...'

Valmont pursued his way with the fine smile of the super-observer. The magnificent Jim had slept too well, also.

3

'Darcy,' said Anne provocatively, 'always eats what he doesn't like, because his father was fussy. And so he lives on it because it's the only thing he's sure to eat. Don't you think that's silly, Monsieur?'

'Is it possible,' said Valmont, watching her victim, 'that he dislikes chocolate?'

'It's cocoa,' said Anne. 'He hates it because it's neither one thing nor the other.'

Darcy obscured himself behind a very large cup and continued to drink cocoa without remark. Anne, seated, as usual, upon the table, inverted her cup above an open mouth, catching the thick sluggish drops with an expert tongue. 'Why is it lady-like to leave an untidy slosh in the bottom of your cup?'

'It is a mark of social position,' said Valmont,

amused. 'Showing, presumably, that you are sufficiently prosperous not to be hungry enough to need it.'

'I am hungry enough,' said Anne simply. 'More, please.'

Bess protested: 'We ought not to have any of it, really. You know as well as I do that it's for Darcy because he was asleep and didn't have any dinner.'

Anne helped herself. 'Do have another, Monsieur!' she said warmly, holding out her hand for the cup. Valmont was not excessively fond of cocoa, and he felt no real need of two cups at half-past ten at night, but it was impossible to resist her laughing glance of invitation to mischief. Besides, he could have sworn that she was acting more from policy than from natural obstinacy. It would not be a bad plan to find out what she was after. 'You are very kind, Mademoiselle.' He surrendered it to her readily.

Pleasantly conscious, under Bess's reproachful eye, of having encouraged perversity, bad manners, and insubordination, he turned a complacently surveying glance on the room at large. It had a dishevelled air; or, perhaps, that was only the impression one got of most of its occupants, Charles, only by courtesy to be called awake in the great chair by the fire, Tony, frankly asleep on the foot of the couch, Bess, worn by the strain of unaided rectitude and responsibility, Jim, hunched over a piece of toast, enveloped in a thickly defensive cloud of silence. That one was well subdued. He had not said a word since he had come downstairs at half-past six, saying that Darcy was asleep and not to be disturbed for dinner. It made one reconsider. Charles, apparently, had more force than one had been inclined to credit him with, or else Darcy had been picking up the pieces with too rude a hand. That was possible; one could hazard no guess as to his procedure, but he looked

as if he had been enjoying himself. He was silent, but his silence expressed only comfort and general benevolence. He wore the air of rigid, almost linear, neatness that had attracted Valmont's eye from the first, the clean, cool, severe colour; he looked the typical invalid, capable of running through a hearty and robust family, leaving them scattered, in various stages of exhaustion, in his wake. Anne, alone, swinging her legs on the edge of the table seemed, if possible, fresher and more vigorous than she had been at breakfast.

'You don't want another cup, Darcy, do you? It's all gone.'

'Anne, how could you!' Bess was shocked. 'Of course he must have another.'

Anne argued: 'How was I to know that he'd want any more? He never takes more than one. Darcy, you know you don't! He's only pulling my leg,' she explained to Valmont. 'To make me think I've got to fag down and get it. You don't want it. You only think you do. Oh, you are a nuisance!' She was vehement.

'Sorry!' Darcy held out the cup insistently.

'He's only doing it to make me go down after it. Oh, you are horrible!'

'Why don't you ring the bell?' This, from Bess, was evidently in some way tactless.

'The bell's gone wrong and he knows it.... Oh, give it to me. I'll get it filled and bring it back. Save time. Oh, I'll make you drink it for this!' She left the room complaining that people, who never do things, should always never do them. Valmont neglected his cocoa for thought. It was almost necessary to consider Mademoiselle Anne clever.

Anne, as it happened, had not been back more than five minutes when she was followed by her father. Val-

mont was not particularly pleased to be caught, by his host, munching toast and drinking cocoa with the children. He had dined very well under the man's eye only two hours ago.

M. Darcy, however, took no notice of him. He had come, not for conversation or for any other form of social amenity, but, solely, to examine a nephew who had been giving him a good deal of trouble. And he did examine him, promptly, expertly and expeditiously. Valmont watched the process indignantly. He wondered how Darcy put up with his uncle's manner. His uncle's manner was simply outrageous. He ran his eye over his nephew casually and competently, as if he had been a horse, with whatever horses have; he tested his forehead and lips — with the back of his hand, exactly Anne's gesture as she felt the nose of the cat, Tybalt, to see if it was cold; he asked a few questions without listening to the answers, took his pulse, and, apparently satisfied, turned to go. One gathered that he would have spent more time over it if it had been a prize pig. From the door, inspecting the wreck-strewn room without a trace of amusement: 'I should advise you all to go to bed,' he said coldly. The door closed behind him, silently.

'Good-night, Monsieur,' said Anne joyfully. And——

'Dépêche-toi, mon enfant, fais do-do,' Darcy's voice, deepened by laughter, assailed Valmont from the rear.

Valmont, having nothing else to do, took his patron's advice but he did so with very mixed feelings. He! He had not been sent to bed since he was ten.

CHAPTER XIV

REJECTION

1

'THEN, Monsieur,' said Valmont, icy but inwardly enraged, 'since my work has not the good fortune to please you, you will permit me to withdraw it from your consideration. For the purposes of your calculation we shall say that I have completed only seven instead of eight.'

A patron is always an obstacle, though this one had, so far, been singularly unobjecting, if not unobjectionable, but if the man thought that an artist could be capable of depicting an invalid with no indication of the fact that he was ill, he was mistaken. Very greatly mistaken, for the finished study was little more than an elaboration, a commentary on his first involuntary protest.

'I shall pay you according to our agreement,' said John Darcy, with odious calm.

'Pardon, Monsieur,' said Valmont firmly. 'I prefer to keep it for myself. And you will understand that I cannot receive payment for work that I have not delivered.'

'You may do as you like,' replied John Darcy, with equal firmness. 'But having ordered the thing I must pay you for your time and work.'

They stood, immovably punctilious, upon their respective points of honour. The argument unrolled itself laden with frozen international courtesy. Valmont was filled with an intense determination that nothing should

budge him. If it had not been already, it would have immediately become, his favourite piece of work. As for M. Darcy — who ever expected anything else? And in the end it was Valmont who offered to compromise: 'If you will allow me the time I may be able to produce something that will be more satisfactory to you.'

'You must allow me to compensate you for the loss of your time,' said John Darcy promptly.

'I cannot permit it,' returned Valmont, stiffening, and to his own partly incredulous satisfaction he carried the day. This incredible victory was not without witnesses to honour the victor — Bess, engaged chiefly in being discreetly John Darcy's eldest daughter, Anne, frankly indulging a taste for drama, Darcy, enjoying the sight of his uncle almost insisting on paying twice for a thing that he could not possibly want, a thing he had not even consciously ordered.

As soon as he was safely gone: 'Oh, do let me see it,' said Anne eagerly. Bess was not much less curious. It had been so much his best work that he had kept it, from the beginning, to himself. He handed it to her in silence. Bess was immediately all at sea. Though not liking it, naturally, she was too prudent to commit herself; but Anne ——. It was amusing to see her reaction, so almost exactly her father's. But Anne was honest: 'It *is* like him, of course, awfully like him.'

'What then,' said Valmont bitterly, 'has it not performed the whole duty of a portrait?' Even on these, their own ignorant grounds, if they were honest they admitted it. What more did they want? But they did not want more, they wanted less — less than the truth to leave them in comfort. 'Then, your objections?' he inquired formally.

Anne, unexpectedly, had an answer to justify, to herself at least, her instant and whole-hearted dislike.

'You think he's going to die,' she said concisely. 'You're wrong. He's not.'

'Anne!' exclaimed Bess, in horror.

Anne turned on her. 'Oh, you think so too. Well, it's nice to be resigned.'

'Really!' Bess was pardonably scandalized. 'I'm sorry, Darcy,' she said helplessly. 'I wish I could think she would apologize, but I know she won't.'

'She jolly well won't,' Anne corroborated her belligerently. 'It wouldn't be me,' she added cryptically, 'that'd have to apologize to Darcy.'

'Well, I'm thankful you are going to school,' said Bess in despair. 'Miss Layton will have to deal with you, for I — Give — It — Up.'

Anne, vocally, pursued her to the door: 'It's a pity you can't act like that when you're trying.'

'My sympathy to Miss Layton,' said Darcy, with a chuckle. He, curiously, appeared to have been enjoying the second scene almost as much as the first. He had been visibly just containing himself and as soon as Bess was safely gone he gave it up and laughed, a vivid extraordinarily living sound of easy amusement. That particular phrase seemed to hold no more meaning for him than any other. Valmont found it difficult to account for, even on the hypothesis (the only possible one) of the well-known pathetic and unfounded confidence of invalids. That confidence he had evidently communicated to Anne. Anne, indeed, was easier, much easier, to account for.

'Well, if you think so,' Anne challenged him, 'why didn't you tell her?'

Valmont composed what must have been too speaking a countenance. 'Tell her what, Mademoiselle?' he asked innocently.

Anne was, even to the point he had hoped, incensed

by his disingenuousness. She cast a hurried look about her, there were no small movables at hand, her eye was arrested by Darcy, still thoughtlessly enjoying himself. She swooped down upon him. One could hardly call it an embrace. It was no more than a swift and rather graceful variety of the kitten's ingratiating duck, the purring thrust and furry scrape of passing affection. 'Tell her that, then,' said Anne defiantly, and left them to say what they liked.

'Tiens,' Valmont dwelt on the syllables in artistic simulated wonder. Inwardly he was congratulating Darcy most heartily on his sangfroid. He had not even looked ridiculous. Was this boy English? One wished that it had been possible to determine if that quick half-gesture had been an attempt to stop — but it had been too quick, and his face more or less obscured. It occurred to Valmont, with some force, that he had been a fool to forget how far, at that age, opinions were on the surface. But now at any rate he was inscrutable.

'Well,' Darcy answered the astonishment matter-of-factly, 'it was either that or heave a chair at you.' His tone admirably carried no hint that he himself might have preferred the chair-heaving alternative.

This, thought Valmont, amused, is le gentleman, he does it very well, the perfection of simplicity, impossible to counterfeit.

Anne, Darcy continued safely, was in a devil of a temper already and in no condition to be baited by anybody. She was, he explained more definitely, very hipped about having to go to school. Her father having for so long quite forgotten how old she was, she had hoped to get by altogether without ever having to, but her governess's mother had died, the governess had gone back to keep house for her father in France, and Anne had been left stranded, hopelessly. 'They always hate

it at first,' said Darcy philosophically. 'She'll get over it, after she's been there a bit.'

'And you?' said Valmont to himself. 'Impossible to tell.' 'A pity to turn her over to a school,' he reflected, carefully aloud, 'she will be magnificent. Young.'

Darcy was very uninterested in Anne's prospects. Too much uninterested? Hard to say; perhaps not. He said vaguely: 'Rotten luck,' with no very understandable application, and then with more show of interest, 'Well, where's the cause of the murder? You might let me see it.'

Valmont entrusted it to him. It had never been in accordance with his view of human nature to expect Darcy to like it. Even for this lively undreading nature there must have been moments, fear, premonition, despair.... This courageous insensibility could not be the result of mere uncalculating light-heartedness, he was not slight enough for that; sweetness and light hardly suited him. He would have made at moments a most unamiable angel. It could be nothing but the equilibrium produced by half-deliberate, half-temperamental self-deception. One half wished that it had not been necessary to show it to him. Cruel under the circumstances, to inflict one of those moments... too much truth occasionally. But Darcy — what nerves he has or — but he is not stupid. Yet this was real. Simply dense? No, only English. Valmont resigned him to his superbly inconsequent nation with something less than resignation.

Darcy, decidedly, lacked the usual brusque repulsion; he inspected it closely in silence and then, from some impulse or instinct, reversed it. He said: 'I think I like it best upside down,' laughing.

'En effet,' said Valmont, not displeased. 'Design is not its weakest part.'

Darcy, humourously startled to discover that he had been intelligent, dived instantly into an urgent investigation. Valmont, not unwilling and not unenjoyably, was jogged up, prodded for facts, urged into exposition. They plunged into significant form and other congenial mysteries. Darcy was, very likably, delighted. 'So it really does bring out the pattern...' He ventured rashly: 'I like it being only a handful of lines, so that it has to be exact or it would be so absolutely wrong. I mean, what a mistake if that line went ——' his thumb indicated a slightly divergent course. He had an eye, certainly, he might be trained, he was very teachable. Valmont, infinitely soothed, regretted that he should not have time to attempt it. 'I say,' said Darcy abruptly. 'You mustn't bother about my uncle. He's never done that sort of thing himself.'

'His opinion,' said Valmont stiffly, 'would never trouble me, certainly, but I do not have to part with good work to a man who does not appreciate it.'

'Oh, of course not,' Darcy was sound enough on this point. 'But it's funny... His not liking it, I mean, because it is much better than the others, even I can see that, and a thing has to be pretty well unmistakable for an absolute outsider to see it. What are you going to do with it?'

'I hope you will accept it from me,' said Valmont, on a sudden impulse.

'Oh, no!' Darcy was horrified; really shocked he tried to thrust Valmont's twice rejected great work back upon its creator: 'It's valuable, I couldn't take it. You ought not to give it to me.'

So that was it. He had thought all along that it was only a question of one's needing the money; that was why, tacitly, he had made himself an accomplice conspiring against his uncle's unexpressed intention, and,

of course, lacking his influence with the children the thing would have been impossible. Valmont's unpleasant hypothesis had been unpleasantly correct. It was not a good time for him to discover it. He lost his temper. He was eloquent. He asked himself and he pointed out that Darcy might do well to perform for himself the same service, by what means one arrogated to oneself the right to decide in another's affairs what he should or should not do. It was to abuse his confidence to make use of it to attempt to interfere in his private affairs. He invited Darcy to remember that to refuse the gifts of the unfortunate man is to humiliate him and to make him feel, more than ever, his misfortunes. He dwelt with energy on the statement that Darcy, in common with the rest of his class, denied to a poor man his pride, inconsistency of the first rank in one of his déréglé pride to disregard for others what he would insist on for himself. Valmont was suddenly struck by the absurdity of his standing over this still slender helpless — haranguing... He said more moderately: 'I do not want to quarrel with you. I like you. I should like you to feel that I was your friend.'

'Damned awkward,' Darcy murmured. 'Here have I been flattering myself all the time... Prematurely.'

'I am very glad to hear it,' Valmont assured him, unsmiling. 'I hope you will believe that I say this only because I would not have you go on with this fatal — shall I say, mistake? Do not think that I do not appreciate your difficulties. I feel that you have been able to accept them in a way not lacking in dignity. I see that you lead a life of representation almost as rigidly public as any one of our Louis. I know that you have been able to organize it so well that even I, at first, thought that it was natural, unintentional, accidental. Do not think that I do not appreciate the miracle of order,

regularity — justesse, in a house where l'œil du Maître is conspicuously wanting, where the only supervision, consideration, or prevoyance for the children is what you have been able to give them. They are lucky and he is very lucky to have ——'

'He has enough to do,' said Darcy curtly. 'I have to do something for my keep.'

'But it is impossible for you to do everything,' said Valmont warmly. 'What of their associates? Who is to choose and, indeed, to provide their circle of acquaintance? What of their place in society which he, by disregarding it, is throwing away with both hands? Is he a man to marry his daughters, to see them well established? Oh, he may give them money, but I tell you that they will have less done for them than many below them in station and prosperity.'

'It's not as bad as you make out,' said Darcy. 'At least they have the family standing — for what it's worth. I don't know much about that sort of thing, but if you think he lets it down you're wrong. People don't come here but —— Besides, there's an aunt. Of course that's not the same and they'll always have to run themselves to a certain extent.... If it's London you mean it does make a difference... Bess would like it, of course, but it wouldn't do any good to say anything.'

'To a man capable of forgetting his daughter's age!'

('Don't be an ass!' said Darcy, in prompt matter-of-fact parenthesis, 'you know as well as I do that it's a thing that might happen to any one.) But I'd do it,' he recurred to it, rather uneasily for one who had so decisively disposed of the question, 'if I thought it would do any good. Or even if I didn't, if it was very important.'

'Not important!' said Valmont, vaguely irritated. 'You say that because you are neither practical nor

experienced. You fall into the vulgar error of thinking that because a thing is not what you want yourself it is not a good thing in itself nor desirable to others. You,' he added, beginning to discern the cause of his irritation, 'you are a hopeless idealist. You construct for yourself a set of elaborate rules of conduct based upon impracticable ideals and then you refuse to associate with the rest of the world except on your own terms, so that while you hold yourself free to give always, you refuse insolently whatever is offered to you unless it is offered, like the culotte of the good king Dagobert, à l'envers. You are young,' said Valmont earnestly, 'and pride and arrogance have not done you much harm as yet, but take care that, with age and habit, you do not become as hard and limited and unable to move under the weight of your singular frozen pride as a man encased in heavy armour.'

'I know that, of course,' said Darcy quietly. 'Did you think you were bringing me some sort of news?... And "impracticable ideals" — naturally. How can any one find out without trying, without experience, what *is* practicable? And how,' with the gesture Jim had been unable to eradicate he indicated the extent and confines of the room, 'what sort of experience can you get here?'

'You can take the word of a man who has had experience.'

'Second-hand.' Darcy's voice disposed of that possibility.

Exactly, thought Valmont grimly. He should have recognized that type before, the type that can without shame condescend to second-hand clothes but never to second-hand ideas, opinions, expressions, experience; that exasperating occasional sport of the human race, the mental aristocrat. But to find it here! Yet, looking

back, Valmont could see the indications that should have put him earlier on the track. Simple to take that casual quasi-indifferent Cornelianism at its face value, and the boy with all the poison of its vehement self-will flowing in every vein, with his peculiar form of humour accusing the rejection of public opinion as an act as natural as breathing. He would rather knowingly take every chance of being wrong than abdicate the least part of his judgment. Aristocrat! What a mistake ever to have imagined that the word could ever have been applied as anything but a frankly condemnatory description of the thing as it had always been. A somewhat disillusioned Republican, Valmont discovered without pleasure that he had been capable of being seduced by this meretricious conception on the intellectual plane.

Darcy condescended to justify himself. Clinging usually to the particular he dropped it with surprising promptness when generalization promised to be the safer weapon. 'After all, experience has got to have something to do with something. You could have all the experience in the world and it wouldn't be much good to you here. If you undertook to live on Mars you'd be a fool to go on thinking your Earth's experience was valuable, or not to think that anything that would work in both places was more important than the rest. And as for being hard,' he added, abruptly, 'you have to be for some things. Anything else would let you down. Honestly, Jules, what would you think if you saw me going about weeping on every convenient shoulder?'

'I should think I was becoming subject to hallucination,' snapped Valmont.

'Thanks very much!' said Darcy, laughing.

Of course he was invincible, invincible as any human being must be, possessing the Manner superimposed

upon that type of mind. The manner, decidedly, was not so inoffensive after all; it was not the first time, it would not be the last, that the better man had found himself defeated by it. Valmont found himself thinking with unusual complacency of what these people in their unshakable insularity persisted in calling the *French* Revolution.

2

Valmont, following his own notions of tact, did not show himself in the North-West Room till after eleven and when he did appear he was rewarded by a farewell message from Anne of such incredible propriety that neither he nor Darcy found it worth while to assume even a pretense of believing that she had actually sent it. 'So she has gone,' said Valmont, in a very proper valedictory accent of regret.

'They all went off,' said Darcy, briskly unaffected, 'not long ago. You've only just missed them. I suppose you saw them downstairs. The message was only in case.'

'Mademoiselle and your eldest brother I saw at breakfast but the others — no, I forget! Tony spoke to me last night, for himself and Jim.'

Darcy's cryptic reply ('that it was very lucky') contained as his tone implied more than a little scepticism of undefined direction and no particular severity.

'They will miss you,' said Valmont not unsympathetically.

'Not likely.... I write to them,' said Darcy tolerantly.

His state was, generally considered, enigmatic. Was it to be considered that he should see himself deprived of all companionship in undiminished placidity? And Anne, who, undoubtedly, had been his principal companion — to see her go without regret? Or was she in

disgrace? Had they settled their differences? Had they ignored them? Or had there been no difference between them? He knew nothing. Nothing had happened unless it had happened when they parted — if they had parted. Valmont found it impossible to 'see' either of them — beyond the certainty that they had managed it in some way unemotional between them. Both of them, if he was any judge, of undeniably passionate temperament and Darcy's, the most contained, the most dangerous, but that situation was very much in the future. At present Darcy continued imperturbably to impersonate an enigma.

Completely. Valmont was even uncertain of his own standing. In fact the more he remembered of what he had said the less he liked it. 'Unable to move' — to him — appallingly clumsy, with the curious fatality that so unerringly causes one to call a blind man 'blind.' And then how much of his lecture — the thing had resembled a lecture — had been justified? How much was annoyance, in itself justified, if not in its direction, over M. Darcy's rejection of — and then to be comically rejected again! But that could not obscure the fact that he had been unfortunate. Darcy had really taken it with astonishing amiability. That might be on the surface. How was one to know if he was not concealing — what might he not be concealing? The type was always extravagant. Valmont had no desire to get himself mixed up with that temper. True, these islanders allow themselves a freedom of expression inconceivable in other peoples; do they, however, extend that privilege to others to practise it upon themselves? Doubtful, to say the least.

Darcy looked peaceful enough certainly, it was precisely the amount and quality of his peace that Valmont found himself unable to account for, an air of

enlargement and leisure, as he lay, spiritually at least, unencumbered by the array, scattered over his person, of paper, pencils, and a variety of books, of which the most impressive was a huge old Latin dictionary propped open upon a cushion under his hand, proclaiming by their sudden appearance the end of the holidays. In spite of all this paraphernalia he was not doing much work.

'You know,' said Darcy, at last, examining his hands attentively, 'it was stupid of you to imagine that I could — cast reflections on your poverty. I live on my uncle. Not that he's my uncle really. There's no earthly reason why I should not beg my way — like the other cripples ——'

Valmont rallied him amicably: 'Must you emulate the kangaroo?'

'What — oh, yes,' Darcy took up the allusion to George's reigning favorite with a laugh, 'rather good. Though you can hardly call me either gray or woolly and you're not likely to find me dancing on an outcrop in the middle of Australia, worse luck.'

'I was referring,' said Valmont, 'to his spiritual condition. They say his pride was excessive.'

'Inordinate,' said Darcy. 'Thanks. All the same, it's not pride. That is self-respect.'

'Oh, you think so,' said Valmont indulgently. 'But if you had more experience you would know that it is only a man of inflexible pride who has that form of self-respect, to trample on his own pride as you do or even to think it necessary to sacrifice it for the sake of the pride of another. That is, he thinks he sacrifices it. In point of fact he merely doubles it and enjoys it all the more.'

Any one, Darcy pointed out, who could enjoy himself so reasonably, was lucky.

Beautifully true to type. He was extravagant. Valmont reflected that he had hit on a true analogy, the capacity for hair-splitting mental attitudes, for finding pleasure in this sort of metaphysical ethics, Cornelian. One could see him, contemplative, going over the plays to strengthen and confirm his error in all its original arrogance.

'Of course,' said Darcy musingly, 'the truth is that I couldn't even rise to it, but it's a pity. They say the young ones simply rake it in.' He complained: 'This family is so conservative.... Lord, can't you hear them!'

Il en était, Valmont reforged an ancient phrase, gentiment égayé, turning hastily to his work, for that expression would do. It was very habitual, it was not uninteresting — faint irradiation of the sunshine of the mind, it would save him the trouble of concocting some prettiness for M. Darcy's benefit. A fortunate accident to have made one notice it. Slight as it was, it had representational value, something might be made of it, something sculptural and enduring, some essence of an inflexible national spirit expressed. Valmont heard the clock strike with an exclamation of disgust: 'So late! I never have time.'

Darcy quoted idly:

> '"Souviens-toi que le temps est un joueur avide
> Qui gagne sans tricher, à tout coup; c'est la loi.
> Le jour décroit; la nuit augmente; souviens-toi!"

... Stop that!' He added hastily, irritated, 'That's to your address, not mine. I have more time than I know what to do with. *I* don't get down to breakfast after ten.'

'And I believed,' Valmont obediently lightened the tone, 'that I was doing that on your recommendation.'

Darcy fluttered the leaves of the dictionary, desul-

torily, without interest, the leaves sliding from beneath the long forefinger in a soft whispering whirr. It was the first time one had seen him unable to keep his hands still. 'It's funny,' he said restlessly, 'when you have more than you can do you always want to get away from it, you're always trying to stick something more in, always just hanging on till you get to the time when you can do what you've always wanted. And when you've got all the time in the world it doesn't seem worth doing or else you've stopped wanting to.'

Valmont's speculations were halted, almost destroyed by the accent of sincerity in this. This was vécu. He had known such moods himself. His presence here was due, as much as to anything, to one of them. He felt an acute sympathy and a vivid impulse to express it; yet he hesitated, stifling the natural response, for to his perhaps too épanchement-exacting eye Darcy had appeared to receive the caresses of the children about as impersonally as the Rock of Gibraltar receives rain, and when one recollected his nationality and his peculiar difficult nature — no, impossible.

'Time's really too long for most people,' said Darcy, on an unexpected note of confidence. 'We can't live up to it. It's easy to do a decent thing if you can do it and get it over, but if it keeps on going on...' he found it impossible to explain his sense of the implacable enmity in the simple length of time, the awful endless levelling of its always and for ever. 'It must be terrible, Eternity,' he said vaguely. 'I'm thankful I don't believe in it.'

It must have been long, said Valmont, prudently, to himself, he himself would have expired of sheer boredom in a shorter time, but why not say so? Not the natural, 'I am dying of nothing to do' but the unnatural, 'Thy servant is not worthy,' the inevitable Puritan coming out even in the best of them; as evidence of racial char-

acter it was invaluable but humanly speaking it added a grain of irritation to one's sympathy.

'Jules, veux tu ——' Darcy stopped, with an expression — a rueful and deprecating smile, a half-humourous, half-exasperated consciousness of the appalling hole he was in... 'Give it to me again. I should be very glad.'

Valmont embraced him.

And thanks to early French training Darcy was able to manage it. The affair had unavoidably its element of the ludicrous but at least it was without the ungenerous rebuff of embarrassment. But if it had only been Charles, he reflected regretfully, and I'd been there to see it. Charles, undoubtedly, would have blown up and burst.

CHAPTER XV

FAREWELL

On the last night Valmont was moved to give Darcy his sketchbook.

Darcy repeated himself almost to the point of disaster: 'I couldn't possibly, thanks. You know you ought not to give it away. It's going to be much too valuable. Think of your descendants. Or you might leave it to the nation.'

'Do you wish to insult — to offend me?' said Valmont, stiffening.

Darcy complained that the thing was as one-sided one way as the other. 'It is a pity that you have such a temper, Jules... Oh, give it to me. Of course I wanted it.' He examined it for about the hundredth time with perennial interest and pleasure. 'I say, that's splendid of Anne... Jim, too... Oh, Lord, that *is* Charles...' He laughed. 'I know this, I know all this... by George, you are good, Jules.' At the end he said, without the slightest trace of embarrassment, 'You know... I haven't many possessions, you have given me two thirds of them.'

'What genius,' said Valmont, sarcastic, 'succeeded in forcing the other upon you?'

'I thought that was in your line,' Darcy commented.

'Mademoiselle Anne!' exclaimed Valmont, suddenly enlightened. 'But how? Is it that she insults you?'

'It makes it a bit difficult, after any one's apologized, to refuse.'

His generosity! She made use of his generosity. It

was entirely necessary to consider Mademoiselle Anne clever.

'*I*'m not sorry to see you off, Jules,' said Darcy coolly. 'I will not be managed by every one. One is enough.'

'Aha, she manages you, then,' said Valmont significantly. It was idle to pretend that he had not had his curiosity about them.

'My good idiot!' Darcy protested imperturbably, in a tone of amused and temperate despair that was not, by any possibility, counterfeit. For him, then, it was nothing, yet it had been quite possible, he was eighteen... A piece of good fortune. To him it could only have been a calamity. For a moment it seemed to Valmont as if they hovered incredibly upon the verge of an open discussion of the affair, until Darcy dismissed it, better perhaps, and more expressively than by any amount of discussion, with a laugh and a look and a final comment. 'Well, I suppose it's the French imagination,' he concluded charitably.

Valmont let it pass, although by this time he was very well used to these open invitations, having learned to bicker amicably and dexterously after the English manner; in fact he scarcely heard it, his attention was caught by the expressive quality of the glance, a glance uncovered, with no attempt at self-defence. Admirable mixture of feeling — a keen appreciation of the character of Anne, a character evidently felt to be delightful; recognition, not without humour, that he was under these tactics outwitted, neutralized, helpless, helpless by every implication; there was no attempt to dodge that, for, not too apparent, there was, behind it all, the very sure and well-learnt knowledge that for him there was, there always would be, nothing. No comment, no complaint. Not a trace of self-consciousness, embarrassment, or self-pity; above all, what struck one was the

absence of vanity, no sense of possession, of conquest, no self-satisfaction, when one might have thought that it was a position that was peculiarly in danger of giving rise to these. And for him they had been simply not possible at all. Valmont, with a rapid summary and simultaneous impression (not untinged by the colour of his imagination), of all that he had found in Darcy that was likable and attaching, enthusiastically gathered him up bodily and with a movement of conscious generosity presented him wholesale to his country. This was English, and in nothing more English or more touching than in the number and quality of the things he was not. One had never liked them, the English, still, one could do justice. If in after life they were unimpressive, when they were young they were incomparable. No race or nation should be required to produce perfection in more than one form, to reach its height in more than one repeated momentary achievement; it should, therefore, be possible, in charity, to forgive this one for producing only promise that was never to be fulfilled. Ah — promise — in that connexion.... Navrant....

Valmont sighed, oppressed by this continual sense of the inevitable, by a surprisingly lively regret for the ending of an amiable interlude and by a decided premonition of coming failure.

He was in despair. His vein was not exhausted and he was leaving to-morrow. True he had his colour-notes and the best of the sketches — he took good care not to give those away! As for the one he had sold and the one he had given, the first was only technique with the slightest of ideas behind it, and the other, well, the other was good, still, but one could see now that it merely scratched the surface; that of last week, for instance, though nothing but a hint was worth more than that. He was in despair... leaving to-morrow. 'Do you

mind?' he said hastily. He subsided onto the couch, working, unlike his usual fashion, with a sort of stumbling intentness, making two or three false starts, with sudden unequal excellences, many corrections, drawn finally into a sourd, revêche, involuntary concentration that gradually blotted out everything else. He worked, with every other faculty suspended, until he knew he was tiring; if he added anything to this he would spoil it. He sighed, relaxing the muscles of his hand, but this time with satisfaction.

'What train do you take?' said Darcy promptly, now that conversation was evidently again to be permitted. 'The eleven? No, listen Jules, there's a much better train at three. It stops at every station between here and London, though.'

Not without some slight feeling of guilt Valmont made a familiar discovery with regard to the time. There was very little more left of it. 'I have wasted your last evening,' he said, attacked by remorse for the unsparing demands of a talent that relentlessly tickets and curtails every second snatched from serving it.

'Wasted!' murmured Darcy, frankly appreciative of the recent spectacle of agonized industry.

'You have great patience. You must have found me an infliction.'

'Patience,' said Darcy satirically. 'I seem to have heard of the word. But any one of my family'd tell you that I never got nearer to it. I always loathed the thing. It's not a virtue, it's a disease. What do I look like now?' He laid hands on the finished sketch, pretending to study it. 'This is better than the others. Much.'

'You think it more like you,' said Valmont idly.

'Me!' Darcy was amused. 'It's nothing to do with me. This is an idea of your own.'

'And I have sacrificed you to it,' said Valmont, with a touch of melancholy.

'What else are people for — or ideas?'

'You should have been an artist,' said Valmont regretfully. Never had he been nearer unreasoning revolt against the senseless processes of Nature, in her central adoration of mediocrity, blindly and unceasingly contriving to protect it. He thought without compunction, if it had been any one of his brothers!

'Artist!' Darcy laughed. 'Would you like to see me draw a straight line?'

'What,' said Valmont, not to be drawn off by this obvious red-herring, 'What shall you do after I have gone?'

'Dr. Temple comes two or three times a week. I had an extra week off on account of you.'

'What do you do?' said Valmont, unfavorably impressed.

'Oh... Greek and Latin ad nauseam — and Scripture when I can't get out of it.'

'And but for that you will be alone?'

'With the children.'

Valmont dismissed the children with an exclamation of impatience. One could hardly expect to find their company anything but a penance.

'You're wrong,' Darcy contradicted him calmly. 'I like children. They're so beautifully logical, pure logic with no silly bother about facts. You don't see it because you've got ideas about how the mind ought to work, but if you want to see how it really does work you let the children talk to you.'

'Do not,' said Valmont, 'be frivolous.' He pondered, finding no more satisfactory companions available. 'Your uncle,' he suggested, finally, without much hope.

'I shouldn't,' said Darcy, not immediately, but almost

immediately, 'I shouldn't strain the imagination if I were you, it's supposed to be bad for you in this climate.'

'He is not likely to suffer from that, certainly,' said Valmont, bitterly, angered by the thought that what he himself had experienced of solitude would be little to what awaited this — a boy of eighteen, ill as well as alone, with the knowledge that life could hold nothing for him. Hastily he expressed an uncomplimentary opinion of his host and patron.

'No,' said Darcy, with answering force. 'You don't know. You don't know my father and you don't know him. My father was his enemy, would have been if he could, that is — luckily there wasn't much.'

'But I thought that you were named for him,' said Valmont in astonishment.

'Exactly,' said Darcy coldly. 'I was. And now — you see what he does, there are four of them — and me. I make a fool of myself and he supports me for the rest of my life. Without a word. I had three specialists and two ordinary doctors. God knows what the price was. I force myself upon him here. I have a man of my own to wait on me. Do you imagine that I am allowed to consider that at all unusual? No, of course that's what one would expect any one to do. And that is not the only thing I have done. I tell you if I had spent years thinking how to do things that he would hate more —— And then I put in my spare time telling him things he doesn't want to hear. And mind you! He dislikes me and I have done that, and he has never been unjust, not once.'

But he would leave him frigidly unaided in his uncongenial situation, with this added comfort: 'I inconvenience him, he dislikes me.' 'Say, rather,' said Valmont, contemptuously, 'that you have not thought he was unjust.'

'He's very kind-hearted really but he doesn't want it Known,' said Darcy, reëstablished.

No matter what one said the boy would defend him to the last breath as he always did. Valmont did not need so much to convince him that he had touched clumsily what should not have been touched at all. But what an odd conjunction, impossible to reconcile, his golden youth, esprit fin, corps attenué, and clear simple spirit, and the coldly self-contained authoritative representative of English barbarianism — a man unworthy — and to reject... Valmont decided that he had something to say to him before he left. He should be made to listen for once, however unwelcome it was and, above all, nothing should be left to the imagination.

'If I had anything to live on myself,' he said earnestly, 'believe me I should not leave you here!'

'Kidnapping!' Darcy laughed. 'Oh, don't worry about me. I shall do very well. No. Jules, really.... I know it wouldn't suit some people, but I'm used to it. I never mind being alone. I write letters and — and,' he added, after an instant's hesitation, 'there's always the holidays.' He broke off. 'What's to-morrow? Tuesday? Curse. Dr. Temple comes to-morrow. No use your waiting for the three o'clock. Give me one of your cigarettes, will you?' He pressed the burnt-out match into Valmont's hand, with an air, as he would never have offered a valuable present. 'Jules, c'était très aimable de votre part.... I should have liked it.'

They parted very properly under the eye of Dr. Temple; and after a rapid exchange of French and le shake-hands, Valmont left by the second-best train, leaving, thanks to his own quickness of hand, an excellent arrangement of dictionaries by Darcy, and Dr. Temple's short sight, two flat packets of cigarettes

concealed in the loose folds of Darcy's dressing-gown.

'Luck, Jules,' said Darcy, at the end. 'And everything you want most.'

'And you!' said Valmont, with some emotion.

'Oh, I have that already,' said Darcy, an enigma to the last.

CHAPTER XVI

THE IMAGINATION OF JOHN DARCY

John Darcy sat and smoked, neglecting his accounts. For years they had been coming in on the fifteenth of the month to be assembled, dispatched, ticketed correct on that date with the seasonal regularity of a monsoon, but on the fifteenth of January, 1909, as if the trade winds were to turn and blow backward, the salutary breath of custom failed. The usual paper lay scattered upon his desk, disturbed but, as far as any usefully effective action was concerned, untouched. John Darcy, filling a pipe among the ruins, contemplated the date, the habit, and the process of its disruption without pleasure. It seemed absurd that a man in his position should be at the mercy of every Tom, Dick, and Harry who should choose to come blazing in — blazing with indiscretion — to interrupt the orderly course of events. He had been very much annoyed that morning by Valmont, the fellow had talked a lot of nonsense about Darcy, of which the mildest had been the accusation that the boy was neglected, undervalued, left too much alone. John Darcy had not had so much difficulty in keeping his temper for years — a damned Frenchman to tell him he was neglecting his responsibilities? And so he sat and smoked and neglected his accounts.

Tobacco calming him, he admitted that the boy was alone, very much alone at present especially, but children must go to school. Bess would be leaving at the end of the year... and how could one encourage that? At any rate that was some months hence... and might be discounted. Meanwhile Darcy was alone.

Shocked as they would both have been to find themselves with anything in common, Valmont and John Darcy were essentially of the same opinion. He too could never quite get it out of his head that Darcy was not likely to live. His mood however was not elegiac in the least. Imagination was no consolation to him. What was the good of that? It could only make it worse. One hated to see children ill and the boy could never get well.

A shorter or a longer time... and even if it were to be indefinite, what had he to look forward to? Life with nothing to live for. Thoroughly alive, with keen senses and keener wits, of an active decided temper and great nervous energy, to be able to use his hands freely and even turn his head...

Above all, young. Terribly and inescapably young and, astonishingly, still capable of irresponsible high spirits, and for future, mere length of days, with his temperament a most efficient engine to tear the heart out of him. Probable extinction one way or the other. But — gradually? And to survive extinction. To exist. It was hard to see how that could be regarded as much improvement on an early death. The whole affair was painful and tragic in the highest degree. And not at all the less for there being so little that one could do to improve matters for him.

Darcy was rather stranded at present, of course; no doubt his situation had not been sufficiently considered. Largely because no one could ever have expected to find him in it. A wonderful vitality. And he was taking it, on the surface at least, much more easily than had ever seemed likely... a wonderful instinct, life.

Hard, unusually hard, but one could do no good by being unbalanced about it. One could hardly keep children out of school for the sake of —— Companion-

ship? With a boy of eighteen? The thing was absurd. It was with no real expectation of doing any good that John Darcy turned down the gas and advanced in the direction of the North-West Room. The house was a large house to be left alone in.

As for Darcy, his uncle's appearance was entirely unexpected and very nearly inconvenient. He congratulated himself on his self-restraint and on the fact that the ashes had gone down with the dinner dishes. His uncle shut the window with emphasis. It was raining and the room was really very cold. It would have taken a very suspicious man to imagine that there was any — anything to suspect.

'This light is very bad. Do you read by it?'

'There's generally a lamp,' said Darcy vaguely. 'But I suppose it's not filled or something.' There never was a lamp unless Anne was there. It had been made sufficiently plain to him that in that house he had few rights and no privileges; a dependent never has, and the affair of Mrs. Skene had been felt. It was very natural, of course. One turned the more readily to contemplating a theoretical sort of type of human being to whom it would not have been natural. They could do very little really, though; they might have done more if it had not been for Fletcher — and Anne. Now that she was gone he was open to it occasionally, but he made an unsatisfactory victim, half the time he had no idea... and such small things, one could hardly imagine any one's expecting him to worry about them.

'Not filled!' said his uncle shortly. 'There must be some one to see that it is filled. Ring the bell.'

'I'm afraid,' said Darcy, deprecating it, 'that you're nearer to it than I am.'

'Do you mean to tell me that you are here alone with

no way of letting any one know... suppose you were taken ill suddenly, or a fire ——'

Darcy laughed. 'Oh, I have a very good voice.'

'And no one would hear you —' he was pulling the bell, really startled by this discovery — 'except the children, perhaps. They would not be much use in an emergency. Have you got a bell in your bedroom?'

'Fletcher comes early. I never need anything at night.'

'This,' said his uncle grimly, 'is a case of criminal neglect. You should have reported it to me.'

It was, indeed, sheer bad luck for the servants' hall that Fletcher's absence — in his room, Darcy conjectured from the depths of his knowledge of Fletcher, reading, in all probability, 'The Mistress of Shenstone' — that his absence should evidently lead them to infer that he was ringing that bell. Fletcher, one knew, was a grievance in himself, taken in conjunction — what hopes!

In the ensuing long, silent, and rather awful wait Darcy found himself uselessly straining every nerve to hurry on what could not possibly happen and what, when you came to think of it, hardly ever did come off — to have his uncle satisfied and as quickly as possible. But as far as that went the man had always had the most abominable luck; he had very ample time in which to walk about the room and contemplate these outrages. Darcy was not the less anxious to shorten the time for knowing that he was perfectly capable of guessing what had been going on and for being pretty well able himself to make out the necessary reaction of his uncle's mind. It was incompetent, incredible, what did he keep servants for? He turned to ask why the fire was not lighted and found it was not even laid. 'You

rang?' said James, in a voice that was a complete give-away, and only then perceived the Master....

With the lamp and the fire lighted and everything as it should be again they were left to the mercy of their own conversational resources, which on the hastiest examination were easily discovered to be scanty in the extreme. Conversation as a social art had never flourished where they were jointly concerned; it had been either short and business-like or painful; they had too much to be remembered between them to make silence possible to either. Something must now be said about nothing.

'I shall have to see about having the house wired for electricity... Have you been reading that fine print by this light?'

'Not exactly. Er — that is, I know it so well that you could hardly call it reading.' Even for purposes of conversation one would scarcely be called upon to confess a childish habit, even if it had been one that had any hope of passing as not particularly out of the way nor unusually useless and this was not. What could he, what would any one make of the long vivid waking dream he had had without even opening the book? The feel of it in his hand had been enough. Of course he had told the children stories, but you can tell children anything. They think you make it up.

'Molière,' said his uncle, after an interval, 'used to be rather a favorite of mine. Which was it?'

'Le Misanthrope.' He suppressed the 'of course' but his voice supplied the omission.

John Darcy smiled. One might have been certain of it. 'Well, who do you agree with, Alceste or Philinte?'

'Oh, Alceste,' said Darcy instantly and unneces-

sarily, for if ever there had been a living 'je-veux-qu'on-soit-sincère,' this was it.

'So did I — at your age. I remember some Frenchman's suggesting that they were both obviously the same man, Alceste, young, and Philinte, middle-aged.' He tried to recall the exact passage, in vain. Annoying. One could see the book, dark-bound, on the third shelf. There was nothing else for it, he should have to go and get it, besides the room was practically unfurnished, not even an ash-tray.

'It might be,' said Darcy, reflective, considering it. He had already considered, rapidly, whether there was any chance of his uncle's finding out anything else that would disturb him, and decided, perhaps too hastily, that there was not, he ran over in his mind all misdemeanours or things possibly to be so regarded, and with both Anne and Jim away they were few and unimportant. With the coast so unprecedentedly clear it was almost a pity to see him leave the room without another word. The thing was, though, that if his uncle were to contract the fatal idea that he was not to be left alone, he was in danger of spending the rest of his life in the company of Fletcher. He was still wondering how to counteract this activity rather improbably attributed to his uncle's imagination when he was surprised by his return, complete with book and ash-tray. It began to look as if he was on his uncle's mind... but why on earth... anyhow keep off the idea of Fletcher at all costs.

John Darcy handed him the book with the remark: 'Your French is better than mine,' and a gleam of amusement at the boy's evident thankfulness in accepting it. Like all good readers, Darcy, it appeared, could not stand having to listen. He read well, certainly. He had the first requisite, an interest in what he was read-

ing. Interest, perhaps, was not quite the word, for Darcy could hardly wait to disagree with it. He condemned immediately the abominable shallowness of the 'charming little woman' attitude towards Celimène. 'Besides he was middle-aged. He played it himself. He wouldn't have written a thing he couldn't have played himself as well as some one else.'

'You forget,' said his uncle, 'that although the argument may have been written for two persons, it was actually written by one.'

'He wouldn't have done a shoddy thing like that,' said Darcy, unconvinced, 'not in "Le Misanthrope." He might easily in the ones he wrote to order, of course.'

They discussed it, Darcy with ardour, his uncle with that moderation in superiority so becoming in uncles.

'Oh, *I* know,' said Darcy impatiently. 'He had to have something obvious, played it up for all it was worth to fetch them. Middle-aged man not being suitably middle-aged like the rest, inhabitant of Mars beautifully wandered in civilized society, that's what made it funny — if you can call it funny. All the intellectual muck that they had to have to make them overlook the fact that it's the man and not their tin potty Civilization that's the real thing. Oh, well, if you can stand, as he stood, seeing that, with the comedy more in the audience than on the stage... It's a height for a moment or something for Corneille. You know it was funny that the first play he acted before the king was "Nicomède," "in the natural manner."'

His uncle had one very good reason for having no opinion on the subject: 'Well?'

'Because Alceste is really Nicomède, inside out. Nicomède human and making mistakes. No, not that really. Say that he's Nicomède set down with a lot of ordinary people in an ordinary situation and conse-

quently making mistakes — because it's Nicomède, it's the poet, it's the insistence on things being either one thing or the other in a place where nothing is either that makes the trouble. So you see it's Nicomède young, and Alceste middle-aged. As he ought to be. And so the same people who wouldn't have him as one were willing to laugh at him as the other. Intensely comic no doubt.' Darcy brooded. 'Don't tell me that lot were intelligent — a lot of featherheads, laughing at their fathers.'

An attitude evidently to be condemned, though one might never have expected to find him condemning it. 'You have an original idea of the people of the Great Century, at all events.'

'If you can call it that with Richelieu and Corneille out of it.'

'I had no idea,' said his uncle, 'that French history was one of your subjects.'

'Madame,' said Darcy, 'was toqué about it. But she could never get it into her head that a country that spends its time getting defeated and hasn't any one that's a patch on their ancestors for character isn't going through the most glorious epoch of its history.'

'Possibly because she thought you were not in a position to teach her.'

Darcy laughed. 'Oh, any one can argue from facts.'

'Oh... evidently,' said his uncle, smiling.

They rested on this — an achievement however one chose to look at it, Darcy reverting to the book, John Darcy to the more frivolous cigarette and a less active mood. The room was more comfortable with a fire, the boy seemed contented enough. One was always apt to exaggerate when out of actual contact with this sort of thing; all substantially true perhaps, but not incessantly in operation. One could only be thankful for the enor-

mous accustoming power of ordinary life, that even for this uncompromising Nicomèdian things could never be altogether one thing or the other, that there should always be the great uncounted army of these intervals, quiet, indifferent, oblivious, the fire in the chimney-place, lamplight on a book, the angle of a head bent in the unaware stillness of fixed attention, the ease and self-forgetting, where to forget was a good thing, a long loose-jointed hand, relaxed, with a look of unused power that was left to it.

John Darcy sighed and moved, for his position had, unnoticed, been becoming a cramped one, discarding his cigarette, and his attention was attracted to the book lying beside his ash-tray. It was so notably battered that it attracted attention. He examined it — Shakespeare. Darcy's evidently. The exhibit could not have been more unimpeachably classical if it had been arranged, yet the boy was no prig, he had more than the necessary obstinate originality naturally to redress the scale.

As he picked it up, the book had dissolved into more or less complete parts — the binding had given, presumably, in those parts most frequented by the owner. One had the curiosity to see which these should be. 'Twelfth Night' and 'Macbeth.'

'So "Macbeth" is your choice.' A curious one.

'It used to be,' said Darcy, absent, still reading.

'What now then?' said his uncle idly.

'Oh... "Lear."'

John Darcy frowned. No doubt the classics are very well in their way — and one should not ask a better, of course — but... Healthy enough for those whose way of life deserved in any way to be called normal, but here one felt that all the irrelevant and frivolous nonsense that could be found to obscure it, was not too

much. And even normally — 'What is joy, 'tis not hereafter' — 'Come away, come away, death' — 'et me laissez enfin Dans ce petit coin sombre avec mon noir chagrin,' rather a bitter and macabre sense of the sources of comedy... and 'Lear.' For a boy of eighteen, it was morbid simply.

Darcy chuckled suddenly. 'I say, this is good... Do you read this, often, sir?' he inquired decorously.

It struck John Darcy with some force that a frank record of the Parisian stage by a highly sophisticated modern critic might be hardly more suitable for a boy of eighteen than a morbid taste for 'King Lear.' An excellent body of dramatic criticism, yet there were undoubtedly some things that read solely in and for themselves could scarcely — this uncertain impression was not lightened by an inability to recollect which of the worst of them might not be included in the present volume. He rose to retrieve his error.

Darcy slid the book behind him, laughing. 'I'm going to read it all — all of it. I — You'll hurt my back, sir.'

His uncle's hand dropped, helpless — he was not fair game for that sort of thing but who could have expected to find him game for anything? And they had talked about nothing, they had succeeded in being mildly personal, his uncle had laughed at him, and he had come near enough to laughing himself.

John Darcy, momentarily at a loss, found the book thrust back on him almost instantly, and with surprising vigor. 'All right,' said Darcy, slightly flushed and with no noticeable appearance of sobriety. 'I — I'll be right-minded if you want me to.' A statement, that taken in the given atmosphere of hilarity, could not be said to carry much weight.

He turned the book over thoughtfully. The boy was eighteen. It did not escape him that in expecting from

the eldest son of John Winteringham considerably less knowledge of the world than he himself had had at that age he had been upon the point of the absurd. The truth was that as one grew older one came to demand not so much the ordinary human behavior observed and encountered in one's own time as a compliance with what a somewhat exacting taste prescribed as proper to an ideal quality of youth that no one had ever been in the least conscious of possessing. Yet judged even by this more severe æsthetic standard things were, pretty much, as they should be. The wonder was that the boy with that experience behind him should be as he was — he had no taste for that sort of thing — no sneaking tastes of any sort, that was certain. Sophistication... somehow it hardly struck one as a pitfall — for him. It was easy to believe that this was a perfectly sound, well-protected mind with a natural balance of its own and a good foundation of unparaded common sense; in all probability he could be more safely left to find himself intellectually than most of the youngsters of his age. In fact there was little enough one would have changed in the long delicate-looking boy lying there — except the fact of his lying there — lying easy and unconquerably well-amused by life, comfortably, leisuredly, and undisguisedly laughing at his uncle, yet with a discretion in impertinence very desirable in a nephew. He did not look ill when he laughed.

John Darcy handed the book back, saying mechanically: 'Lemaître is one of the best modern critics, though I prefer Brunetière, myself. But if you're interested in criticism I should advise you to begin with Sainte-Beuve.'

'You can get to be one of the best modern critics pretty cheaply at that rate,' returned Darcy, unimpressed. 'About the capacity of a saucer of water. Lord — Lord — what a simple soul.'

'That affectation of simplicity is rather deceptive,' remarked his uncle.

'It wasn't that,' replied Darcy cryptically. 'It's thinking that sort of thing's anything. I suppose it makes the ones that read it feel civilized and they respect themselves for it.' He fell into the middle of an article on 'Midsummer Night's Dream,' reading with a malicious enjoyment of a certain tendency to flounder among the fairies displayed by this eminent modern critic.

His uncle continued absently to observe him. John Winteringham's son — strange, one was apt to forget that. The boy was very like him. Yes — straight features, nose, mouth and chin, very like, though Winteringham had always been a splendid-looking man. Brains too of a limited sort. Still one was struck chiefly by the contrast, the incongruity of this father and son. A very radical difference in character. And yet, John Darcy hesitated, how much could he be said to know of the boy personally? Apart from what he believed, without perhaps having any very presentable ground for believing it, what he actually knew amounted to this — that he answered, when he was spoken to, in what appeared to be a normal manner. Temple it was true thought well of his ability, Madame had commended his disposition, Walling his heart and his digestion, as for Valmont the fellow might be said to have raved. But he himself... having had the boy on his hands for years he had been satisfied to take everything for granted that could bolster up his peace of mind. He knew that the boy could be trusted to keep things going, to do what he was told to a reasonable extent, and to be as little trouble as possible to every one. As for all the small facts of taste, opinion, habitual thought, and run of feeling that go to make up a personality, he had never

taken the trouble to assume that Darcy had them. In the face of this one could only be struck by the rashness of the original impulse that had brought these children to Caldersham. Looked at coolly now the thing seemed like madness; how could he have known that no harm would come of it? True, it had not been done without misgiving. And a little more selfish scruple would have left this — of all others — to an almost purgatorial existence. It was not pleasant to think how little. If it came to that, what had he done, beyond providing a certain sort of material comfort — better not put too much emphasis even there, handed over to servants, left to himself, without companions. If this was the way he took his responsibilities he might almost as well have washed his hands of them in the beginning. On the impulse of the moment he sat down on the side of the couch and plunged into an exhaustive examination of Darcy's education.

Dr. Temple was more than satisfied with his Latin, though Greek might be said to be more distinctly his subject; his French, of course, was remarkable, but his English began and ended with Shakespeare.

Darcy was in an awkward position; he had no books of his own; there were few to his uncle's purpose among those the children had; Madame was responsible for the French; he had read rather a lot otherwise — books taken by Anne, without permission, from the Library downstairs, but — the way to admit that without involving Anne? On the impulse of the moment he confessed, very cheerfully, to an ignorance he did not altogether possess. His uncle pondered, sighed, took up the burden. 'There are certain things,' he said, 'that every man of education must know.'

Darcy found some diversion in the thought of becoming a Man of Education.

CHAPTER XVII

EDUCATION

JOHN DARCY spent some time in drawing up a systematic plan for a course of reading that might be expected to do almost anything for any one. It was a wonderful plan, comprehensive, extensive, progressive, giving an excellent outline yet in each of its parts capable of indefinite expansion. It embodied an idea he was discovered always to have entertained, that one might have some idea of all the activities of the human mind by studying English literature. It corrected what he could not help thinking a tendency towards too much poetry.

It was a highly articulated, solidly constructed plan. It involved a certain amount of work, naturally, but one had no reason to suppose that the boy was lazy; under the proper direction he might do much. As for direction it could be said without fear of self-flattery that he knew what he was doing. Comparative literature had been for him that most thoroughly learnt of all subjects, the subject he had never taken for examination, learnt for itself, absorbing a most undue proportion of his time, that one alone remaining after many years of the many that he might be supposed to have brought down with him from a place like Oxford, all that was left of a time when he had read anything and everything, made bibliographies innumerable, when he had so misspent his life that to this day no manual or textbook however complete and formidably sown thick with the names of forgotten authors could offer him more than a hand-

gallop through familiar territory. He could still glance through them casually, finding little or nothing new....

In those days he had been fairly ambitious. He still had the notes he had made for a more or less seriously projected History of Opinion in England, Its Variety, Their Fluctuation; while he had given up his Review of the Art of Criticism only under the severe discouragement of seeing his conclusions so often anticipated by Professor Saintsbury.

What was even more to the point was that he had had a real taste for literature. At one time he would never have imagined that he could spend six years almost cut off from reading, but at first work had been a necessity and then a habit, he was tired and fell asleep over a book, he got into the way of buying books and not reading them, soon every other interest was swallowed up by Agriculture. Now with this stirring up of old interests he felt that much of this must be put right; he enjoyed himself thoroughly, for he had an admirably systematic mind; he enjoyed especially the elaboration of its various parts, looking forward as the thing shaped itself to those parts of it, unhappily somewhat advanced....

The idea, if one had had it, of anything solemn, instructive and hard-working in the application of this scheme died early and easily, the boy being naturally no pious self-improver. One could not be too thankful of course to be delivered from that type. Yet there was no doubt that the plan was in some danger of suffering from his inveterate capacity for enjoying himself. To do him justice he did not even put up a pretence of 'this is being done from a sense of duty,' but making no bones about it simply went ahead and enjoyed himself shamelessly. As for his uncle no doubt it was better than falling asleep every evening over Blackwood's.

The main difficulty of a thing of this sort lay, undoubtedly, in the application of it, and he had, naturally, given some thought to it. If one could have been satisfied to place the list in the boy's hands — but it was decidedly the sort of thing that called for some sort of supervision — one almost regretted not having gone in for the sort of thing that could not, left to itself, go wrong. (Very little good to be got from anything that could be in his experience, though.) The thing seemed to call for some sort of preliminary remark and caution. But then the difficulty how to begin — and where? No doubt the strong point of the plan lay in the way in which one thing led to another but with the finished plan so complete, such a well-rounded whole there seemed no obvious indicated beginning. One could not point to any one book and say, 'Begin there,' although no doubt once well begun the plan was capable of conducting him through graduated unfolding vistas to a very just notion of the position of affairs in almost any department of education. And then, how to proceed? There must be some discussion of things. Left alone within this maze of universal knowledge.... John Darcy began to see himself deeply involved in this educational scheme; it seemed that he was about to set himself up as a tutor not in one but in every subject under the sun.

Of course much depended on the boy. With adequate authors indicated and an occasional hint as to the drift of things one might reasonably hope to keep him fairly straight without pretending to omniscience. And for the actual start the natural opening was an explanation of the bearings of the plan itself. One might hope to make it interesting enough to hold his attention for at least a brief exposition of first principles. John Darcy decided to indicate only the skeleton of the plot at first, better to leave the more intricate and detailed

ramifications to follow naturally when their time came.

Darcy received the neatly drawn-up chart with its firm clear account of his future life with every promising indication of receptivity. John Darcy congratulated himself; the boy was intelligent enough to take an interest in anything; lacking that, of course, the whole thing would have become impossible. He explained his theory in a few words. Darcy proved himself quite capable of appreciating the force of systematic coördination. The basic idea, in fact, appealed to him strongly, he picked it out quickly enough on the sketchiest indication. 'It's absolutely It, sir, you can't get round it. Everything written in English is English.' His keen attentive eyes were singularly brilliant as he turned his head on the pillow. 'Everything written in English is English, but is it literature?'

'It depends,' said his uncle, 'very much on your definition of literature. I don't want to depreciate the "literary" qualities, but I could never agree with people who were so dazzled by them that they could not see how much they were degrading literature if it was not to be regarded as the expression of the whole of human experience. And it has always seemed to me that we lose all claim to intellectual straightforwardness if we insist on these qualities to the exclusion of some of the most important — for it is nonsense after all to say that some of the most important works of speculation that have ever been written are not English and it's clearly absurd to apply principles to modern books, principles that would rule out Hobbes, Locke and the "Origin of Species." I think we may usefully take the term Literature to include whatever has been written in English that is accurate and an authority in its own field.'

'You can get almost anything by doing that, sir,' said

Darcy reflectively. 'If we're out to read everything that's ever written we shall have our work cut out. Not that I object to it, of course. I should like it.'

Not a bad ambition for a young man, though rather a waste of time, in the present instance, while as an objection it hardly followed. 'In fact if we were to apply the word accurate too drastically we should have very little to comfort us.' They might find themselves reduced eventually to the multiplication table, which, he pointed out, would be quite unnecessarily arid. 'I should say that we must admit first everything that is commonly called literature and where that falls short, then take those of the more technical variety, and from them, I think, only those that stand undisputed at the head of their class in its own way. I think that is the only way we can usefully judge them. Their own standard is their only standard and they must be allowed to make that standard themselves.'

'By George, sir,' said Darcy, taken. 'You can do almost anything with that. Anything. And if there was only one book on it you could ring it in to be it, you could do anything,' repeated Darcy, obviously tempted. 'Take history now. How do you manage that?'

History, his uncle pointed out, was difficult. Possibly the most difficult of all to manage. One had to treat it — he had been forced to look at it in three ways. In the first place it was desirable to include the earliest adequate presentation of an era as giving a more living apprehension of the sources, the genesis of method and the scope of the art. The sources themselves, he could not resist the interjection, came under the heading of 'pure' literature, in many cases; in some, pure literature of the most delightful sort. In the second place one couldn't exclude all those attempts at history that found their way into the ranks on their actual literary merit,

for however much facts might suffer in their hands they were responsible for the creation of the method; their methods had made the presentation of innumerable contradictory, interrelated, and apparently irrelevant facts possible; they had turned chaos into an art and a language for other men to use with more approach to mathematical accuracy without, very often, any respect for the men who had taught them to give facts a human value, as we use language without knowing how it arose or what might be its origin. In the third place one would get a very false idea of history unless one had some knowledge of the most generally accepted account of the most undisputed facts, which should always be checked by the latest and best of modern theory and opinion. In this way, he explained, the subject became, undoubtedly, complicated and difficult to handle. He himself had hesitated more than once but roughly, one felt, in following this three-fold aspect — the first account, the best authorities, the literary thing — three or four books, three or four on each of the more important epochs of the history of the world, three or four on the more important periods of the principal nations (with of course, special questions for reference and biography reserved), three or four on an average fairly covered it. One picked up the necessary regulating information easily enough by glancing over one or two of the more modern textbooks. In this way the thing was not in reality difficult.

'You've worked it out, sir,' said Darcy instantly. 'It must have been gorgeous to do. Where is it?'

After all there was nothing like giving the boy a thoroughly comprehensive idea from the beginning, nothing like having a clear view; starting from well-defined principles one could proceed more usefully. A vigorous well-balanced mind naturally follows more will-

ingly any scheme of procedure that has been shown to be logical and necessary, the chief end of education might be said to be accomplished by pointing out what there was to do, the soundest way to do it. If one could get the boy interested all that remained reduced itself to keeping him on the right track in the capacity of intellectual man on the boundary.

Darcy absorbed the whole of the list with undiminished capacity. 'What about biography, sir?' he said, unsatisfied at the end of it. 'You can't say that because this man has had the luck to strike a chap who can write he is any more eligible than the one that hasn't.'

His uncle admitted the difficulty. It was one he had given some thought to. How, for instance, Reynolds' being represented by his 'Discourses on Art,' could one omit a mediocre biography of Gainsborough without endangering the balance of the thing taken as a whole and giving a very one-sided impression of eighteenth-century art?

Darcy suggested a species of unofficial codicil. 'Don't put it down on the list but say, "You'd better read it, anyway."'

His uncle laughed. Life was too short. One could not attempt the lives of all the men who deserved it. 'I decided to compromise on a series of types — "lives" of a certain literary merit in each of them. Take the life (and letters, one couldn't acquire too early a taste for them), the life and letters of Darwin, a very readable book, let Darwin stand for nineteenth-century science, with any biography, standing for its class in the same way, that deserves to be read for itself — Colvin's 'Keats,' Morley's 'Gladstone,' Carlyle's 'Frederick the Great,' Boswell of course... One can always correct statements of fact. And it is often possible to get some

idea of a man's contemporaries as we go. Of course the greatest men are a sine qua non... The thing is rough and ready enough but as long as we keep an eye on the unrepresented majority we shall not go far wrong.'

Darcy commended this ingenious solution, not without signs of undisguised amusement. His uncle found one could not help liking the look of him — an attractively alert face, with his amused responsive look — compared to him his brothers had never looked quite awake. Still there ought, one felt, to be something to prevent any man's labelling a perfectly sound-minded unconscious boy, fastening upon him the epithet-like 'ce garçon délicieux.' Delicious. Impossible, these people....

'All the same, sir,' Darcy complained, 'I'm getting fearfully mixed in my mind. Some come in magnificently under literature, with no questions asked, and some only just scrape. What's the principle? When you say literature where do you base your judgment?'

Darcy's education began with Saintsbury's 'History of Criticism.'

The results of this rather inverted beginning were hardly so serious as they might well have been if it had not been for the energy and common sense of the boy himself. He scarcely needed the warning one felt it necessary to give him of the danger of too much generalization, speculation divorced from fact, in the pernicious form of reading books about books instead of the books themselves. He gave no sign of being contented with a second or third-hand account. Indeed almost his first thought was characteristic, 'Where are we going to get all this?' the pages of the tremendous first volume running like water through his fingers.

'I think we shall have enough to go on with,' said his

uncle, turning a deaf ear to a plaintive request for Aristotle and Longinus. Nevertheless the thing was characteristic and the boy's attitude perfectly reasonable: 'Don't give me these things unless you can go through with it, logically'; reasonable and fortunate. After all with the solid outline of the plan before them, it was the logical approach — the historical method being discarded as in reality absurd and misleading (invaluable of course for reference, it must be kept in mind) — the sensible approach to attack the subject from as many angles as possible. One cannot approach education from one defined beginning — many converging paths... but never lose sight of the whole.

This system, somewhat lacking in system, suited Darcy perfectly; he was very luckily at the stage of reading everything he could get his hands on; he was undoubtedly quick and intelligent, with a natural taste for ideas and above all in possession of a most remarkable memory. To offset this he could be if he felt like it sublimely inaccurate, while to assume that he always meant what he said could lead to nothing but confusion. And although he remembered without any sort of effort whatever he liked, in revenge, if he did not like it, nothing could equal the cheerful blankness of his mind. His uncle did not like to see him so much at the mercy of his likes and dislikes. He pointed out the value of actually learning as part of a necessary mental discipline. Darcy countered with the age-old suggestion, in these circumstances, that it would be a lot easier to learn to like it. 'You know it does happen. You're always saying, "Well, I'll never come to that, at any rate." And after that it's about the first thing you do come to.' You were never absolutely safe from it, he said ruefully, deprecating the possible advance of new invading interests.

His uncle suggested Mathematics as a fit subject to experiment on.

'Oh... Well... Mathematics,' said Darcy, disparagingly. 'It might be all right if everything wasn't settled beforehand *for* you. Now if a rule could depend on circumstances or the disposition of the person that was using it or the date or the weather or something — though if it did I should be done more often than I am done now — but good Lord, no matter how you look at it, it makes no real difference. They're fixed,' he said, dismissing them, 'they're fixed. They have no future.'

'Your grandfather hardly thought so,' said his uncle. 'At any rate I have heard him question the conclusions of almost any one in his own line — including Newton. You know it was always said in the family that it was a great comfort to him that there were vagaries in the conduct of the planet Mercury that Newton could never be said to have accounted for.'

That appealed to him, of course, odd that that sort of thing should be most natural to him, but, after all it was as well, perhaps, he made no attempt to go into it. Personalities on the subject of their family entanglement were better left. To do the boy justice he had never shown the faintest desire to pursue any personal aspect of the unfortunate relationship, thought John Darcy, in the perfect security of knowing that he was about as likely to go in for it himself.

'Well, it is a luxury,' said Darcy largely. 'It is *the* great luxury to have an unbiased mind. And so, in a small way, I always like to catch experts contradicting each other. You do get a chance of having an opinion of your own, at any rate. You're not absolutely forced to have some one else's ——'

'That would be a calamity,' said his uncle drily.

'Well, you haven't got to depend on it, and it quite

irrespective of fact possibly, and you having no fact of your own to check him with. In that way,' he said again, 'it is a luxury to have a book, by a good man. He's not out to explain everything on earth, or everything that ever happened, on one theory. Or if he is, he doesn't act as if there was nothing to be said against it.'

Definition of luxury by Darcy Winteringham, aged eighteen. 'I thought,' said his uncle, amused, 'that you were all for things being one thing or the other.'

'One might think,' said Darcy, unabashed, 'that it would be a good thing if things were one thing or the other, but as long as they aren't, what good does it do me to have some one telling me that they are?'

'That rather rules poetry out of court then,' said his uncle. 'Being essentially an assertion of pure values.'

'Not at all,' said Darcy promptly. 'There are pure streaks in flawed emeralds.'

'Admitting that,' said his uncle, 'for the sake of argument, though I might ask you where you get your information, what satisfaction do you find in asserting that the emerald is flawed?'

'There is a satisfaction,' said Darcy stoutly, 'in not leaving any of the facts out of the picture.'

'Then your picture is likely to be a picture of chaos.'

'A complete picture of chaos,' said Darcy lingeringly, 'would be something. But something would be sure to be left out and by the time it was strung together it wouldn't be chaos.'

'The trouble with you,' said his uncle irresistibly, 'is that you have no objection to a poet's telling you that things are all wrong. What you object to is some unfortunate and well-meaning person's telling you that they are all right.'

'I don't object to either, sir,' said Darcy cheerfully, 'as a matter of fact the best ones don't do it — but I

don't object to any one that does as long as they give it to me honestly as a momentary impression. It's only if they try to force it on me as the constant state of society and the universe.'

His uncle could not resist the opportunity. A man would stand little chance of forming a useful idea of either without one or other of the mathematical sciences.

'An ornamental education is all I'll ever need,' said Darcy comfortably.

John Darcy found himself degenerating under his nephew's influence. After all it hardly seemed likely... he was struck by the significance of one reiterated phrase. 'It would be an appalling thing, of course,' he said, 'if any one were to *force* you to do anything.'

Darcy coughed, a nasty tickle evidently. At last. 'What... I, sir?' he said mildly. His innocent tone was belied by a lively and appreciative eye. It was safe to say that each of them had a pretty fair idea of the man they had, respectively, to do with.

But whatever his shortcomings as a pupil, John Darcy had long ago discovered that he had some merit as a companion. More and more he found Darcy's reliable memory almost as useful as and more available than his own notes when it came to details about the estate.

When the children went back to school John Darcy, who had found the summer holidays unusually long, had his old desk moved up to the North-West Room to keep documents where they would be more convenient. Coffee had long been served up there, and Darcy for some time had been able by the exercise of great ingenuity, now and then, to ruin his night's rest for the sake of five minutes' indulgence.

CHAPTER XVIII

JEAN

The intervals between Education, Agriculture, and Correspondence Darcy often found it necessary to devote to thought, and those parts of his thought that did not happen to be strictly private soon began to be very thoroughly taken up by Jean. There would never have been a greater mistake in the world than to have imagined — if he had imagined it, which was doubtful: he might have had an undefined optimistic feeling about it, but if he had ever gone into it he would have known that, on the face of it, it was very unlikely — to have imagined that the simple fact of having everything absolutely all right was going to turn Jean into the patent non-upsettable infant cherub that no one ever had been. Much less Jean. He never needed anything extraneous to do that for him. He could always upset himself. He could be perfectly well upset on no excuse whatever.

No, no one had expected Jean to turn perfect, least of all Darcy, who knew him. Every one had to be naughty now and then, of course; you had to expect it. And you could generally deal with it; only Jean had invented his own brand of naughtiness for himself, and Darcy, privately, would have chosen almost any other, for it was a peculiarly trying one. Some children turned freakish and some (he knew of) went furious, and some simply had a devil and some were only feebly fractious, and some merely needed sitting on occasionally for their own good, and for all of them you could probably devise something on and for the moment, but what could any one do with Jean?

He took it into his head to be sick. Oh, not right away, of course, that was the end of it; first he had his feelings hurt, and then he was miserable, unconsolable (that lasted into the night), and then he was sick. Like everything else he chose to do — if ever he chose anything — his position was absolutely water-tight, unassailable. It didn't seem to be of any real use to try to put a spoke into the misery from the first in the hopes of staving everything off and forestalling the consequences. It was hardly ever possible because he was too quick even for Darcy; it might have been possible that he would also have been too tenacious but this was not invariably admitted — even by Darcy. Trouble, with Jean, came up suddenly out of nowhere, full grown. A word was enough for him, he was off, generally, if not admittedly, well out of hand from the beginning.

And never of course a word from any one but Darcy. It was, in its way, a compliment, but one he would have gone out of his way to get out of; he could have done without the responsibility for it. It was not as if there seemed to be anything he could do to stop it. There did not commonly appear to have been anything particularly off about what he had said — nothing, in reason, to start all this trouble. He came to the conclusion that it had about as much to do with the day, the weather, or what he had been eating as anything else. This was likely enough, but indigestion couldn't be held to account for everything, it was worked for that enough, and on some days there was no — oh, not often fortunately — but what can you do with an inconsolable little devil that will be neither appeased nor abated for any one? What could Darcy do? He was not generally — well, really never — cross with the imp, he was never strong and patient (oh, Lord — Charles!) he was scarcely ever impatient, why should he be? There was no excuse

for it, for Jean was neither slow nor tiresome; he was not exacting, not exactly demanding; he liked attention but he was generally quite content with his own slightly unfair share of it, to share it even (with George, at any rate); more often than not he was quite satisfied to be there without being noticed. And he was noticed quite as much as was good for him, if not more. He was not peevish or irritating — he had much too much sense for that — he knew what he could get and he knew better than to tease for more; on any ordinary day anything Darcy chose to do was rightness itself in his eyes, and he would have died rather than show off even to Darcy.

In all of these ways he was uncommon and valuable. And yet Darcy was coming to know too well a certain way Jean had of looking at him. Any one might have thought he had offered to wring his neck. It could not have made more trouble if he had. It always meant that they were in for it. No matter how long it was put off, and it might be for all day, they would have what passed with them for passionate recrimination. There was no use saying that they had nothing to make trouble about; what Jean lacked in the way of grounds he made up for by sheer undeviating continuity; it was almost impossible to stop him; he could not possibly stop himself; he seemed always driven by some unnameable, unmanageable excitement, thrown into a state of frantic grief that had to wear itself out, leaving him in a condition Darcy liked even less: Jean exhausted, motionless, inscrutable, fixing him with that uncomprehending hopeless indifferent look, intelligence extinguished, an indefinably uncomfortable sight for any one who valued intelligence, intelligence extinguished but resistance, never. Nothing more misleading than to conclude from this very quietness that it was

any less effective in a certain sense than if he had chosen to go into hysterics. And then, very often, the doctor.

It was a dead certainty that Jean was not going to get any easier to look after as he got older. If he had more sense he could pick out a more tenable grievance — he had a devilish good instinct as it was; if, in the course of events, Darcy was unwillingly gathering more experience, Jean was developing a bitter and accurate memory. One thing brought up everything else that had ever happened, every past encounter went to furnish fresh accusations, familiar material passionately reiterated, passionately and unfailingly insisted upon. Passion, of course, was rather a big word to apply to a thing of that size, but for his size Jean was unusual. His force was surprising and not too reassuring, if he was occasionally a handful now, what would he be when he grew up?

Any one might have had some excuse for thinking that Darcy, if it was only by getting used to it, might have improved in execution when it came to dealing with it. Unfortunately he did not. Instead of liking it more he found himself liking it steadily less and less. 'That filthy excitement,' his own uncompromising definition of it, had always been his special detestation. He had had more than enough of it in one way or another, and not always from Jean either. The fact was that he was as sensitive as a cat to that form of electricity. He had an unerring if unwilling sense for it if it was in the air, it seemed to collect about him — always about him somehow; his father at any rate had never been known to choose any one else. Storms in general, if there were any working up, lit upon him to gather about, when hadn't they? He had an attraction for them. Very often when he was younger it had happened to him that being of a very prompt disposition in these affairs, he

had lost his temper first in response to something that had not yet come into the open and therefore acquired a character for beginning things that was quite mistaken. This characteristic had been no help in his relations with his father. And it might easily do him in when it came to dealing with Jean. Privately Darcy had always harboured the conviction that he himself at any rate was essentially almost feeble with good-temper and inoffensiveness; he knew he had never begun a thing some one else had not really begun first; he always felt that if they would only leave him alone there would never be any trouble, never. But if they came to him at certain times bringing sparks he exploded inevitably. If there had been no spark there would have been no explosion, and it seemed to him that he was the easiest person in the world to get along with if only any one had known how to do it.

All this was very pathetic and it simply meant that he had a jolly good alibi for not knowing always how to keep his temper. His temper was his own particular nemesis; it bothered him more than he would ever have admitted to any one. A story — rather a silly story — in which some one or other had the strength of a madman had often had the effect of vaguely distressing him, and he never really liked to remember that he had once or twice done things when he was angry that it would have been very hard for him to do later when he was not. However, luckily, there was not much question of that now.

But all this was not as much as to say that Jean could put it over him. Hang it all, it would have been a thing if any one of eighteen should hesitate to take on a child of eight. It was simply that he never enjoyed quarrelling with Jean. With any one else he rather enjoyed the cheerful sense that he could be dangerous in

a quarrel — a good sight more dangerous than he was being. With Jean he could have been glad to have been harmless, for there was always the chance of his being very much more dangerous than he had ever intended to be. As it was, he lost his temper — or he didn't and felt like the dead afterwards. That was probably the real reason he disliked these affairs, if he actually succeeded in doing any good for the moment he felt so tired afterwards. Clearly a simple case of laziness. Selfishness and self-protection. Oh, well... everybody felt like that occasionally, but they didn't have to go in for it in real life. Or excuse it to themselves afterwards. No, nor admit it very often — most people.

After all what could you expect from a child when you had all you could do on some occasions to keep your head yourself? What on earth was Jean to do with his difficulties if every one else found him too difficult to do anything for him? What was there that any one could do for him? Sit on his head? A dignified performance if any one tried to do it to Jean. A nice thing if a child of that age could reduce his elders to scrapping on a level...

Now what could make Jean behave like — well, it was hard to say what it was like — what did he get up and go for, without any excuse? Oh, of course, catch him giving one if he had it, still — go away and stay away? It was new to find him beginning to avoid *Darcy*. They had not had a quarrel for ages. 'Well, you are an optimist if you take that for a good sign!'

Of course he and George were to go to school at the beginning of next term. That might account for something. Even the feeble-minded must know that he would be miserable there, a school that suited Jim was no place for Jean. (Nor, much more, for George.) No need to ask if Jean knew it, one would have to be both

feeble-minded *and* an optimist to imagine Jean not objecting to going away, not objecting violently. But he had said nothing about it and there was no use reminding him if he could forget it. Probably he couldn't. But at any rate that couldn't account for this, there was no possible connection between that as cause and this sort of behaviour. The idea of Jean practising being away was merely humorous. Nothing could be less like him. Then why this astounding novelty? Darcy, watching him closely, exhausted every theory without accounting for it. It must come eventually to an explanation and probably at the same time an unholy row. Oh, curse... what it was to be lazy...

Damn it all, he had always had such a hold on the infant. At one time he might have been seen to have been flattering himself that he knew how to handle him. If any one ever needed some one who did it was Jean. No one could do it who had not a jolly good hold on him. Any one who had had better do anything rather than lose it. Darcy girded up his loins and waited for an opportunity — no good rushing it ever with Jean, let it come. Darcy went on waiting. The thing was not so easy with George always there. George, dear soul, would be very much in the way; he had never seen the worst they both could do on occasion and he was not going to. One upset at a time is enough. Darcy waited, storing energy. It was really rather hard on the devilkin to be so well prepared and he all unaware.

At last the time seemed set. On a Sunday morning with George safely in bed with an indisposition (the only surprising thing about it was that it belonged to George and not to Jean), Darcy, with his prey in view and casting about in his mind to decide whether an opportunity might be assumed or induced under these circumstances, was expounding to Jean the true nature

of the difference between Corneille and Racine, with an eye rather more on some objections to his views sponsored by Valmont than on the task of making everything perfectly intelligible to his present audience. Still it was good for him. And to do him justice he was quite willing to listen always, and in fact, appeared to prefer to listen to things he couldn't possibly understand. Of course he got the benefit of hearing a generous supply of the plots of both dramatists described at some length and in some detail, for a novice no matter of what age he was couldn't be expected to follow much unless he knew what it was about to that extent at any rate, and it made things get very much clearer in the explainer's head anyhow, no matter what it sounded like. Besides the stories were the things he could be made to understand most readily. He knew most of them anyway, and though they were not perhaps ones that he was likely to be particularly attached to, he always had the pleasure of picking up references to things he knew and knowing that they were talking about a lot of things that they both knew together.

If there had been nothing else he would have been contented to exist on the quotations, for Jean was always to be caught like a bird by the sound. He could be trusted to know which of Shakespeare's songs were rightfully to be obtained from each play as well as what could be got extra-legally, to draw the whole of the Wind and the Rain from the otherwise unpromising tracts of 'King Lear,' or on the score of some resemblance that lingered on Darcy's ear to resolve 'Tell me where is fancy bred,' into 'Oh, mistress mine,' and 'Men were deceivers ever.' It was quite obvious that he tolerated 'Le Cid' for the sake of six or seven verses that were not simple Alexandrines; it was impossible, though Darcy had often tried it, to scamp matters by

simply implying that Don Rodrigue, after a scene with his father, was left to try to make up his mind what to do; it was always: 'Tell me what he said,' inevitably. And it was always necessary to go religiously through all the changes that could be rung on it: Faut-il laisser un affront impuni, faut-il punir le père de Chimène? So with a magnificent disregard for mere words was Jean ready to bestow the same devotion on the similar stanzas of 'Polyeucte,' on any chorus from 'Esther,' or on the 'Hymn to Jesus Christ' itself.

With all this accumulated load of plot, quotation, and argument, exposition was not entirely easy; with more important considerations in the back of his head it was not made easier for him; it began to be decidedly difficult when it became clear that Jean for reasons of his own had taken a dislike to the idea of Horace killing his sister.

'Of course,' said Darcy reasonably, 'no one ever said he ought to have, infant.'

'Then what did he do it for?' He was easily enough discovered to have been the author.

'An author,' said Darcy, 'doesn't exactly do or not do whatever he wants to. If it's the sort of thing that sort of a man would do he's got to make him do it.'

'But they don't,' said Jean, with strong signs of obstinacy.

'Not very often perhaps,' said Darcy easily. 'But if there was that sort of a man and that sort of thing happened that was what he would have done.'

'But there isn't,' said Jean. (A man like that, evidently.)

'Not now,' said Darcy, 'but he lived ages ago when they were all more likely — oh, I don't know — even now if everything was right for it, it might come not to absolute killing of course but something pretty near it.

Even in *his* time of course it would have been more likely to have been something else.'

'Then why ——' began Jean quickly.

'Because he hadn't any choice; because that was the story; that was the sort of man he was, and that was the sort of thing he did.'

'I think it was a silly thing,' said Jean, for the second or perhaps the third time.

'Of course you can say that,' said Darcy calmly. 'And you can say that it was not a good idea to go in for that story, or you can say that it's not a good thing to do it on the stage, but when you see what a lot of different kinds of people there are the one thing you cannot say is that some one of them won't be found doing *anything*.'

'Well, but they don't,' cried Jean, exasperated.

'Well, but they would,' said Darcy, amused. 'If that was what they were like.'

'But they aren't,' said Jean helplessly.

'If that was what she felt,' said Darcy, 'and that was what he felt, that was what would happen. You see you can't tie an author down to things that are always happening every day. As a matter of fact you've got to allow him to have people that are a little out of the way themselves, for ordinary every-day ones aren't always the kind of folk things happen to — oh, of course, things might very well *happen*, but that doesn't make it a tragedy. That is, if it's going to be a tragedy you've got to do something — I can't explain — to it. Suggest that — little people with things happening to them. But in the old days that was comedy. Because of its being something that happened to them, not something they're responsible for themselves. Themselves bringing it on themselves, you see. Oh, they might, but it would be by their own weakness, not anything else.

But you see with our lot it wasn't any little thing, it was the best things in them that brought it on Horace. It was his courage and her courage and his patriotism.' (And of course both their tempers, but that was neither here nor there.) 'Of course if you'd rather think that a tragedy happening to people who are too weak-kneed to help themselves is greater than one that swamps a man who can stand up against everything except his own great qualities, you can think so.'

It was at this point that Jean (New Style) got up and started to leave the room, no reason offered — nothing.

'Where are you going?'

'Away.'

'Feel sick?'

'No,' said Jean, definitely burning his boats.

'Well, come back and sit down, then, I want to talk to you.'

Jean came back, silent as usual, slid on to the side of the couch, kicking off his boots (he always hated them), to sit in his favorite position, each ankle encircled by a hand, wrists crossed in the process, chin on his drawn-up knees, eyes fixed on his brother in a grave steely watchful look he did not often use. And Darcy, rather chilled, knew by the look of him that Jean had been waiting for this as long as he had if not longer.

'Why were you going away?'

'Because I wanted to.'

'Don't be childish, you know what I want to know and you know I'm going to find out.'

'Well,' Jean threw back his head, with an odd sort of arrogance, and said deliberately, 'I don't agree with you. I don't, very often. I was going because if I stayed I should have told you that you were wrong — again.'

Darcy felt a vacuum. He said mildly, 'And is that all? All this sitting about and going away?'

'You don't know how often you say things — sometimes I can hardly stop myself... Darcy, you're wrong — you are wrong sometimes.'

'Well, good Lord, why not say so and be done with it?' A horribly tactless thing to say, for Jean seemed to think he was confessing crimes. Here Darcy felt more or less lost — that sort of thing was nothing!

'You don't *know*,' said Jean darkly, and Darcy being injudicious enough to smile he hurried on passionately. '*You* think it's all wonderful! It isn't, it's silly. No one ever did things like that. No one ever talks like that. No one ever will. There never *was* an albatross that looked like a postage-stamp. And you wouldn't like it if there was. Your old Shakespeare's just the same, it doesn't say anything, it doesn't mean anything. It's just the same old sound over and over. And if you try to understand it it's just — just mad and — and extravagant, like the others.' He fell over the long word ridiculously and was silent, angry.

'Well you can think so,' said Darcy calmly.

'Do you want me to disagree with you?' furiously.

'I don't mind, mon cher.'

'I — you — you don't care... You think it's funny. You think everything's funny... *You*,' violently, 'I hate you. I'll never tell you anything again.'

It was exactly the sort of thing the little idiot might do. This sort of nonsense could be as serious as if it was really about something. Darcy began to be more than a little worried. Jean could get away from him if this was to be kept up. Oh, not right away of course but gradually — after each time more, mightn't he? Disagreeing was really the crux of all the trouble they had ever had. It was the one thing Jean could never stand. But good Lord, how can any one expect to get out of it?

'Now look here,' he said experimentally — Jean was

far from looking anywhere with his face hidden in a tangle of arms and legs. 'Suppose you always agree with me. I say a thing; you say: yes, isn't it? I say: yes, of course it is. And that's about as far as it can go. But if we don't agree we've got something to talk about for the rest of our natural lives, because I'm not fool enough to imagine I should ever convince you — obstinate little brute you are — and I don't suppose you think you could change me, could you? So don't you see how much less dull it would be?'

Jean without moving a muscle managed to radiate the most absolute dissent. 'Hang it all,' said Darcy very reasonably, 'you have a right to a mind of your own. It's silly to let some one else make up your mind for you... People don't have to think the same just because...'

From Jean's ominous stillness it was evident to Darcy that he was crying most abominably. This was the old game with a vengeance. Now about all that remained was to send for the doctor. Darcy's hitherto admirable calm deserted him, he lost his temper abruptly and very thoroughly. Never, but once, had he lost it quite so thoroughly in his life.

'You little ass, it makes no difference, no difference at all.' There was no possible doubt, from his voice, that he was furious this time. He found himself tearing the arms from the face of a terrified Jean, who clutched him, crying, 'Darcy — your back! Lie down.'

It penetrated, somewhat late in the day, that he was sitting up. This light broke slowly and pleasantly upon him. Having poked himself in the back and found it surprisingly intact — or at least... nothing to worry about, Darcy decided to be exceedingly proud of himself. He subsisted in a dreamy state and dwelt on the fallibility of doctors. Pleasant to think of the shock it

would have given them to see him gone berserker with impunity. It pleased him still more to think that he had always played Sir James for a fool. Jean was kneeling beside him, imploring him to lie down. He arranged himself on this support, saying: 'Don't wiggle, infant. No, I'm not lying down. I like the view from here.' The room, indeed, had a different look, or perhaps a certain light-headed feeling had something to do... He found that he was very calm and amazingly good-tempered. He said easily: 'You see it makes no difference, si tu m'aimes autant que moi je t'aime. Stop ruining the front of my best dressing-gown. Besides, you said you hated me.'

'It's because,' Jean gasped... 'Ah, tu sais que je t'adore!'

'And what would Jim say?' Darcy inquired with grave amusement.

'I don't care what he says. I don't care how old I am. I — oh, I can't bear to be different. I only want to be like you always — always...'

'You idiot,' said Darcy gently. 'You little idiot.' And he kissed him competently. And what would Jim have said to that? 'I'm going to lie down now if you'll promise me ——'

'Anything.'

'— promise me that next time you feel like contradicting me you'll do it properly ——'

'Oh, yes!'

'— Call me all sorts of a fool, that never hurts any one. Who knows,' said Darcy hopefully, 'you *might* convince me. And promise not to start thinking I don't ——'

'Oh, I promise.'

'And next time you have a ghastly feeling like this, you'll tell me about it instead of turning yourself into a

muted string, with me thinking you had contracted a lingering disease. Worried me ——'

'I'll do anything,' said Jean desperately, 'if you'll only lie down.'

'Swear not to tell then. All right, of course, I know you wouldn't. Can you hold me if I go limp... Put me down straight if you can.' Of course he could not but... better than nothing. 'Right,' said Darcy, a bit breathless. 'That cigarette-case — under my left hip. Everything I lose always is... Left, I said, my good soul.'

'I know,' said Jean, with dignity. 'Only if you say it to me quickly I have to think of shaking hands.'

'Wait till you get geography exams,' said Darcy cheerfully. 'What with east and west you'll wish you were not born. Say east is right and west is left, what do you shake hands with then?'

'I think that's a silly game,' said Jean, after an interval. There was no doubt that it was, especially if you did it with a slip of the tongue. Darcy selected a cigarette deliberately. The cigarette case was his latest, so there was no reason why it should not be his most — privately — his most valuable possession. An old one of his uncle's (the catch a bit rocky from the beginning from the look of things) flicked at him the other night with the remark: 'It has my initial on it, but I expect you can make it do.'

Darcy grinned at the old English D (Aunt Fanny for a million!) and wondered if his uncle realized that he had acknowledged his namesake. 'Matches, Toto?' But his uncle — Darcy knew him well enough to guess that if he should ever come to like any one he would also come to deny that he had ever done anything else. John Darcy being not without a little of his sister's useful gift of self-deception — a man who had deluded himself into adopting five very doubtfully profitable

nephews under the self-induced illusion that there had not been anything else to do!

Jean hung over him with lighted matches, saying gloomily, 'I suppose they will always make me sick.'

Darcy offered his gravely. Jean accepted the flattery with equal gravity, but he was realist enough to refuse the cigarette.

'Your digestion's ever so much better than it was, think of all the things you eat, now,' said Darcy comfortably, 'and by the time you're my age you may be able to do almost anything.' They shared in silence the unkind but not altogether unpleasant knowledge that it was George that was spending this glorious day in bed, and not, as it might more naturally have been, Jean. Not of course as if there had been anything... but a day in bed hurts no one if it is not to be a regular thing.

So they spent the rest of the morning peacefully, Darcy propped high on his pillows (two from the bedroom and even then he was not satisfied; Jean had to scour about for others and took Anne's or what would have been if — because of not having to go through the nursery), Darcy smoking rather too much with a deep regular intake, the cigarette very red and going in no time, Jean curled tight against him, chin on palm, a sharp elbow in Darcy's chest, watching with that curious desolate stare of his — well, it was always hard to say what he was watching. It was probably only the colour of his eyes.

'Funny to own a thing like that,' said Darcy to himself idly. 'Something like a cat. Yes, those eyes... can't tell whether they see you or not. "You can have me but you can't hold me." But he wants to be held. And it'd never do any good in the world. Only one more thing to make you do what you don't want to, diablotin.

Good Lord, why must he go to school? Too little for his age, too much will in such a small space — infinite will in a tea-cup, that's what knocks him out. You'll be deadly unhappy, Toto, and me not there... Oh, *God*, I'm so tired....'

'Back ache, Darcy?'

'No — funny.'

Of course it was funny and no doubt it meant something, but he was too tired to think of anything, at present. But what a morning's work, Jean untangled and set to rights, something that might do to keep him straight, and Sir James Taylor magnificently diddled into the bargain. What a morning's work!

CHAPTER XIX

RECALCITRANCE

JOHN DARCY lingered over his dinner, faced by the prospect of another evening to himself downstairs. The holidays had been longer than their numerical content of days would have led one to imagine; an evening to himself had no particular attraction of its own at the moment; but, on the other hand, could he honestly consider himself satisfied with Darcy?

Darcy, certainly, might easily be considered to have gone rather too far. It had been a considerable surprise to his uncle to find him attempting, quite seriously, to interfere in affairs that were conspicuously not his own. It showed a sort of disrespect, though his manner in itself had been perfectly respectful, which he could not but feel was the result of his own injudicious — familiarity? Well, that was hardly the word... That he should feel licensed to offer his advice on that subject, not only to offer but to press it, saying with such persistence that they were both too young for that school, that George in particular was young for his age, was clear proof that he himself had been to blame. In plain words he had been in danger of spoiling the boy. It was as well perhaps to know it; it could be remedied. John Darcy was a disciplinarian; he had been thoroughly spoilt himself.

He had been really disappointed in Darcy, if only for his persistence on the question of Jean, persistence to the point of asserting that an English school could not suit him, of bringing into the argument (for it had been

that, there was no blinking the fact), facts and suppositions, which, it had been necessary once for all to show him, his uncle was not prepared to discuss or consider then or at any other time. And even then it had been so evident that Darcy was silenced rather than convinced that he had left it incumbent on him to point out, rather more warmly than he might have done at any other time, the selfishness inherent in his position if he attempted to interfere with Jean's opportunities, for it was an opportunity for him to be sure of a solidly founded education. And although it might be natural for any one to wish to have the child with him, he must not allow natural affection to degenerate into a form of self-indulgence that, beginning with an obvious lack of consideration for his brother's future, must end in some out and out damaging of all his prospects.

Darcy had taken this quietly, yet it was to be feared that there was in his manner something that might conceivably have been taken to have been more in the nature of forbearance than anything else. It was impossible to resist the conviction that under an unassuming manner Darcy was as headstrong, as assured, and as unmanageable as ever. All this was the result of his uncle's most unwise indulgence. He had rather allowed sympathy to run away with him. He had taken for granted every good thing, he had never even tried to correct the boy's faults... it had not seemed necessary. At the back of John Darcy's mind there lurked the irksome knowledge that Darcy, at any period of his career, would not have been exactly easy to correct.

Useless to condemn him though for simply doing what he had been, practically, encouraged to do. John Darcy was convinced that the mistake had been his, but it was easier to perceive it than to discover what should be done about it. He was persuaded that the

sensible thing was to adopt a considered course of action and to stick to it, but the time for considering it had never naturally presented itself. During the holidays it would have been wasted time, for the opportunity to put it in practice could not occur, while now that some course of action seemed about to be demanded of him the time left for considering it was all too short. Moreover it was not a thing that could be postponed indefinitely: to begin to put off that sort of thing is practically to abandon it. John Darcy was determined that it should have his careful consideration. And if his action — his absence at any rate — should be noticed, it might prove to have a salutary effect. He was far from intending to do anything marked, nothing could be more perfectly uncalled-for, so slight a deviation from custom was scarcely a thing to be noticed.

Of course it is true that small events mean more to a youngster tied down and forcedly inactive. When nothing happens any break in the general monotony is to be looked forward to. The day, no doubt, had been solitary enough, for the children had left early in very good order. Still, Darcy would not do so badly if he were to have only one long evening to miss them in.

It was a material fact that the children had left in good order; surprisingly good, all things considered. No doubt the head of a household ought not to be in a position to know of all the small storms and uncertainties that go on beneath the surface of its seemly life. No doubt there is a certain derogation of dignity in admitting in matters of this sort that order and obedience may be less than unquestioned. A less candid man would not have admitted it.

It was admitted — it could hardly be acknowledged. Nevertheless John Darcy had not succeeded in not being aware, not only that more trouble might distinctly be

anticipated, under his arrangements, than it would have been at all convenient to acknowledge, but that there had actually been less trouble than might reasonably have been expected. Not that anything could be said to have been said. Or even — however respectfully — conveyed. There was, at least, no question of that. It was more than enough that it should have been possible for him to have been made aware of it. And aware too that it must have taken some doing on Darcy's part to have had everything go so smoothly as, by small signs and indefinable element of surprise in the attitude of the family (undoubtedly in a position to know), it was inferable that it had gone. This in its way must be called satisfactory, though satisfaction at finding things as they should be might be mitigated by the necessity of having to allow that things might not, after all, have been as they should. All this, it struck him suddenly, with a certain grim humour in the reflection, left him, in all probability, not too popular at the moment with his refractory young man in the North-West Room. 'Coffee upstairs as usual, Eames.'

It then appeared that Eames had already given instructions for them to have it sent up.

Coffee and his uncle entered to Darcy unmistakably oppressed in spirit. He accepted them both as one accepts a matter of fact that calls for no particular comment. He secured coffee by a masterly exhibition of absence of mind, displaying to a not unappreciative audience a complete and magnificent unconsciousness of there ever having been a question made whether he should have it. He was looking fagged; an eye used to distinguishing shades of pallor might have detected him as being rather more done up than he had been seen to be lately. His manner was reserved and abstracted.

He seemed more than usually inclined to be silent, he had evidently no remarks — not even the most casual sort — on hand to offer. His uncle inspected him rather sharply; he had not imagined — he had never believed the boy to be sulky; it would have been the last thing... He did not believe it. A certain quality of silence was not uncharacteristic of Darcy, he was capable of concentration, he had been known before now to give a display of sublime abstraction, absorbed in some wild speculation of his own, probably some extravagantly ideal question on his mind, and to throw it off, emerging with some expression of lucid idiocy at the end of it. It was true that he was not much in the habit of sighing.

Hard as it was to associate him with the word it was impossible to escape the conviction that Darcy was depressed. The thing was natural enough. There had been a most unusual attachment between the two. Curious. It was not as if it had been an attractive child. Not that one had any prejudice. But no one could call him likeable — sulky, fretful, self-centred, and secretive ... Still it was natural for the boy to feel his going. After a few words on indifferent subjects exchanged over their coffee John Darcy moved to the desk and embarked on a somewhat unnecessary letter — on business, naturally, he wrote no others. Better for him to have company for the moment, but one could leave him for the time being more or less to himself.

Darcy fortified himself with coffee, inventing methods of approach. He was oppressed by a sense of mountains of expense piling up over him, Ossa piled on Pelion all right. The man might have been excused for feeling that he had spend enough on him already. Darcy had done his best to think that it might not be necessary;

and he had not succeeded. Methods of approach were various but none of them ideal. He discarded one or two as too intricate to carry through, selected the most direct, delayed to give the coffee its chance, sighed again, and broke in upon his uncle's considerate calm.

'I'm afraid I shall have to ask you to send for Dr. Walling.'

He saw at once that he had underestimated the effect of this. His uncle swung round on him without an exclamation, but with all the appearance of it. Naturally he was astonished, nothing he knew could have led him to expect it. He didn't say a word, only looked. Darcy said, hastily: 'It's my back — so much better than I ever expected it to be.'

'Better!'

'It seems a silly sort of thing to complain about ——' It sounded unconvincing even to him. This was going to be interminable. Now they would explain and explain. Darcy shut his eyes and felt for the edge of the table; there was a little ridge thing of wood there that gave you a purchase.

It was a perceptible effort — that table wasn't really heavy enough to act as a lifting weight — the other time had been so easy — things went round so — and he had wanted to see how his uncle took it.

His uncle, however, had always been quick in thought and action. Strong, active, and determined, he acted quickly now in a way Darcy had never anticipated. The thing was a decided shock. Darcy bit his tongue under the force of the impact and reflected that it was a mistake for the dead to rise without warning, he could not stand being rescued often at this rate, his strength was not equal to it. He felt shattered; he was forced to lean heavily on his uncle's shoulder, saying rather

breathlessly: 'It's all right — quite all right. I've done this before. It makes no difference.'

John Darcy scarcely heard him. His brain was refusing to accept it. He certainly could not be said to have believed his eyes, indeed he could scarcely be said to have seen what he had acted on so promptly. He retained only a vague impression of Darcy — not so much the fact that he was up as that he would be over in a minute. Even now the thing did not seem more possible, the sense of touch conveys nothing... Sensation balked at being converted into thought. His only feeling was one of trivial surprise, surprise to find the boy so tall. Sitting beside him on the couch their eyes were on a level, standing they might have been very much of the same height.

Darcy found the room steadying momentarily; he had, from where he was, a very good view of his uncle's face. He laughed suddenly and helplessly. 'The — the carpet,' he gasped. 'It *is* red, isn't it? I never noticed it before. Who — did any one ever th-think it w-went with the w-wall-paper? I'm s-sorry I startled you, sir... so frightfully giddy. It must be the coffee. I hadn't much dinner and that's always...' He found himself very expeditiously back on his pillows again. He secured his uncle by the arm. 'If you get me a glass of water I shall scream. I shall be perfectly all right in a minute.'

His uncle, recovering rapidly from the effects of surprise, put him through a physical examination that left nothing to the imagination. Darcy lay on his front, burrowed into the pillows, and laughed; he made little real headway against a regrettable tendency to answer serious questions frivolously. Any one could lay inexperienced hands on his back and he did not feel sick, cause had somehow shaken loose from effect, he could

be hauled about pretty well with impunity; he put his elbows on the pillows and his chin in his hands and that springs your back considerably, and when it was all over he put both hands over his head and stretched, and sank himself low down in the pillows without assistance. By this time his uncle had had time to realize the heinous side of his former confession. He expressed himself well and forcibly on the subject — thoughtlessness, recklessness in experimenting on a back like his, taking unwarrantable chances lightly, taking the risk of undoing all his years of being careful. And for what? The momentary satisfaction of startling his family. As he had been genuinely afraid he became even more genuinely angry. He developed this theme with vigour; some of it verged upon denunciation. It was a notable discourse. By all odds it should have sifted Darcy to the foundations.

As soon as his head cleared, however, he had occupied himself chiefly in an attempt to extract his cigarette case from its customary retreat. Not an easy thing to do so directly under his uncle's eye. You could move only very slightly with him there sitting over you. Darcy was aware enough of the wonder of his being able to move at all. He slid his off-side arm behind him by cautious degrees till it was as far down as it would go; there ensued an obstinate struggle, he could just catch it between his first and second fingers — but the dashed thing was so slippery. At last... and his back had not said a word... 'And what,' said his uncle, at the end of his philippic, 'what do you expect after all?'

'Nothing,' said Darcy, quiet and rigid at once, 'no one could do anything for my leg.... Have a cigarette, sir.... I suppose Walling will make an appalling fuss,' said Darcy restlessly.

The next day, being Wednesday (not that that had anything to do with it), Walling arrived early to produce his punctual expected appalling fuss. Darcy began to feel the impropriety there was in his making this unprecedented recovery of his, going and falsifying the best medical prediction... He suffered, without patience, exhaustive examination, he became the subject of an endless consultation; his case began to cause comment in the higher circles of the profession. Walling, enjoying himself thoroughly now, called freely on all sorts of eminent colleagues for advice. All their eminence could find no reason for the 'marked improvement in this case' — case, case, case, if it wasn't that it was patient — no reason at all but youth, strength of constitution, health (formerly perfect), complete rest, and the excellent care he had received — good man, Walling. All this was simply a throw in for Walling; no wonder he enjoyed himself, being provided with such an unexpected slice of reputation, simply a bit of marvellous luck. Not that he wasn't a good man, but every one knows that hundreds of good men are never heard of. If, in the confidential gossip of the profession, it was acknowledged that Taylor had made a mistake you can depend on it that fact was not allowed to reach profane ears, but — Darcy, not without malice, was also not without hope — perhaps at least it might penetrate as far as that obscure young man whose more hopeful predictions had been obliterated by his pontifical superiority.

Darcy, though marked for a patient, beginning without patience continued with a growing disgust. He was not cut out to play the grateful patient. He loathed all doctors; they took him out of his own hands; he had not the faintest right of possession in his own person, no vestige of control. He had always sworn to look after himself and even at times when it had seemed unlikely

... but that was only in little things, after all, while this —— He was perfectly aware that he was being unreasonable, but he was not vain in the least, why should he object to classing himself with the rest of the human race? They denied his individuality; he was a highly interesting case (he felt no gratitude for being interesting), he was a freak, a raree-show, a right-of-way, a thoroughfare, ought to have been administered by the Highways Commission.

It would have been a comfort to express his opinions of and to them, but nineteen is more circumscribed than sixteen. Besides, then he had been only Darcy Winteringham, and John Winteringham's son at that; now he was John Darcy's nephew. Muffled by the propriety now to be expected of him he whipped up his exasperation to a bitter anger. They did not even allow him an interest in his own affairs; no, whatever their silly news might be, he would be the last to hear of it. When they had quite finished conferring, deferring to one another, disagreeing politely, every rule of etiquette preserved, they would proceed deliberately to communicate with his uncle. And his uncle would come, with the utmost delicacy, to prepare his mind. Oh, damned funny no doubt, but he could not appreciate it — making them both ridiculous. What did they think he'd do if they told him plainly — disintegrate?

It was in no profitable frame of mind that he received his uncle's remark that he had spent some time that afternoon with his doctors.

'Some time trying not to commit themselves,' said Darcy bitterly.

His uncle said, 'They were anxious to avoid rash assurances naturally. But they seem fairly — I should say they were reasonably confident.'

'"Subject to proper precautions one could expect a

very measurable degree of improvement," poisonous jargon they talk,' said Darcy coldly. 'Why can't they say it straight out?'

'Naturally no man wants to raise false hopes,' said his uncle quietly.

'They don't want to fall in again,' said Darcy deplorably. He added calmly that it had been plain all along to the humblest intellect that the most he could ever expect was to be able to get about in a sort of a way on crutches, the only question was whether he could rise to that or not. Whether his back would stand it. And as far as he could see the only way to find out was to try it.

'Of course,' said his uncle, 'unless they thought your back sufficiently improved they could not allow you to try it.'

'It went and improved on them,' said Darcy, dripping sarcasm, 'while they were not looking, so now naturally they don't know whether it's improved or not. The whole thing's been most unprofessional and they yearn to be well out of it. Well, they have my blessing on it.' Darcy yawned. 'I shan't detain them.'

'I suppose you are not even interested in the affair,' said his uncle drily.

'Oh, not particularly,' He yawned again. 'It would be a nuisance — take months to find out probably. I expect it wouldn't be worth it.'

'I don't see how you can refuse to try it,' said his uncle unwarily.

Darcy murmured drowsily that at least there might be a little privacy again; he was getting tired of feeling like a lucky dip — people rummaging about... And he gave an accurate presentation of one overcome by sleep while his uncle went through a painstaking account of medical opinion as far as it had been unfolded to a lay-

man. He finished to the accompaniment of a silently artistic struggle to keep awake.

Darcy said politely: 'It's awfully decent of you, sir, to bore yourself with them on my account. You must have had a ghastly time with three of them. Did you take them one by one or could you polish them all off at once? What always finishes me is their majestic minds. Shall we go on with Burton, sir?' He stretched, with some caution, and interlocked his hands behind his head, the picture of comfortable indolence.

John Darcy confessed to a slight feeling of mystification, induced by these elaborate tactics. It was one thing to break news, circumspectly and with a decent avoidance of undue agitation, but such abnormal lack of curiosity in Darcy was new to him. He caught himself studying this pose intently, either it was very well done or — it was very well done. One suppressed as one could an instinctive movement to take his pulse. John Darcy took his seat, filling his pipe, thoughtful, in silence.

Privacy. No one could have chosen a word more likely to appeal to him. Lack of privacy — odd one never thought of it, yet it was one of the hardships imposed on an invalid, and no minor one. Never to be free of interference, always to be subject to an informal or arbitrary right of search. No doubt one of them at any rate had had enough of it.

Later, however, he could not resist the temptation to prescribe. A simple sedative, something for the night. He found Darcy, in bed, singularly wide awake in spite of all previous manifestations of sleep; he set down the glass on the table beside him and would have left the room without speaking, if Darcy had not caught him by the wrist: 'Not you, sir! I didn't mean you.'

'No one can say I have not been the worst offender,' said his uncle composedly.

Darcy grinned and, outrageously, dismissed an excellent man and an inimitable uncle as negligible. 'You don't count, sir. You never did.'

Under the circumstances his uncle felt himself justified in taking his pulse.

Normal.

Darcy mocked him. And in his voice, the intonation, although it was discreetly done, there was something that, faintly but unmistakably, could only be described as familiar.

October, November, December, three months that Darcy and any one that had to watch him struggle through them with nothing — on the whole, nothing one could do to lighten the burden of it, must have been happy to forget if such a thing had been possible for either of them. Each night Darcy shut his eyes on the pretence that there had been no day, that there would be no new day, that somehow there would not have to be, and each morning found him acting on the assumption that there would never be another night. He was childish in this, he lost his sense of dignity; worse, he lost his sense of humour. There was nothing in the world; it was a flat desolate aching weariness; he had never imagined that any one could be so tired. To get up tired determined to spend the day making yourself more tired than you could very well bear, that was all there was in it, that was what they called getting better. Always to be doing more than you were able to do, always outrunning your energy — what there was of it when it was practically non-existent, always calling on more strength than you had, living on the ragged edge, having to live on your nerve just when you hadn't one. What he learnt then he was never to forget. It was a damned sight easier to be ill than it was to recover.

And all this for——? For it was not the plain physical side of it that had the deadly quality of slaying him whenever he thought of it. No matter what it was like it couldn't last for ever. But all this for —— Oh, no doubt he should have been rejoiced by the idea of — crutches? Talk about raising false hopes! Does any one call that hope?

Better any day to have nothing in peace and apart, unnoticed, than to have to go trailing through life on the highways a living mockery of what he might have been. You could say that he had been, to all intents and purposes, dead. Very well. He was used to it. It makes a great difference what you are used to. He had faced it, accepted it, ordered his life to overcome it. As Valmont had said, that life had not been without dignity. But this!

Then it had been done, he had done it, he could forget it, he could live without thinking. Sometimes for hours it dropped out of sight, sometimes for days. And always as he grew more used to it those hours lengthened, there were more good days. Now against his will he must come back to life that could not be other than painful, condemned to an existence of perpetual half-measures, dragged back to life, if you could call it that, half-life, raw misery, by a merciless strength of body not strong enough to do the thing thoroughly, not strong enough to do more than force his suffering will to supply the strength that gave out as soon as it was called upon. strength that was not, never would be, there unless he killed himself every day to raise it. And to do it too with nothing settled to fall back on, nothing adjusted, every experience immediate, felt, nothing softened by custom. No, he must start again. Hadn't he done enough? Nothing was ever done, you must do it all over again — differently; past experience no guide, accept the deadly

half-measures he had always loathed, consent to be half-alive, invent and practise a much more complicated technique of living, solve a whole new set of problems so that they might be, eventually, forgotten as he had forgotten the others. All very simple, no doubt — simply discover a new plane of existence, terraqueous, amphibian, neither fish nor flesh nor good red herring.

It was not possible to do that over night, yet until it was done there would be no rest, no peace, no satisfaction. As he was able to look back on it, it had always been his one ambition to walk on a level with experience, which was not (always to be equal to every occasion!) perhaps, quite as modest as he had thought it. Now at any rate there was no denying the fact that experience had got well away from him. Oh, no doubt in time... He felt desperately that he could have caught up with it if he had only had time, but everything came at once, nothing could be postponed, there was no such thing as time.

All the same it might have been almost simple if he could have slept. But, as it always did with him, being tired meant lying awake. He might well have given up the game ignominiously if it had not been for his uncle, for his uncle came out most unexpectedly.

John Darcy, whatever he might be when confronted by a problem in human form, had always been excellent with animals. No one in his employment had ever been better than he in managing them, sick or unruly, both in judgment and — what one might have been less inclined to suspect — in the actual handling; cases of sickness or temper, high-spirits or ill health, as each in its own way required. He had that reputation, and it was well-founded. He had been, though he had had no dog since old Lad died, at one time something of a dog-owner and what was more a good owner of dogs. Darcy reduced

to the physical basis could not have asked to have fallen into better hands, firm, matter of fact, and surprisingly gentle. Above all, to have no nerve-racking fuss, no expression or appearance of undermining, unarming sympathy.

Darcy was inexpressibly thankful for it. It was his uncle that brought him through, not only with self-respect preserved, but even with some little semblance of credit, fêteing his good moments as they deserved, for they were distinguished strangers.

John Darcy's remembrance of that time was largely of reading, for Darcy was too far done to resist it, reading aloud evening after evening, with Darcy, drawn, quiet, deeply but unobtrusively indifferent to everything that could possibly happen to him, lying exhausted, extinguished, more drained of life than he had ever been seen to be before he had officially recovered, as far as he could manage it outside the circle of light from the lamp, too weary to keep awake for more than a few minutes, too tired to stay asleep. And always, as long as he could hold up his head, not only perfectly well but very much better; the only complaint he had been known to make: 'You get so tired of being tired.' And that had been less a complaint than an apology.

CHAPTER XX

RESPONSIBILITY

Bess came home from school filled with the best intentions. She was sorry to leave; but she left in a mood all schoolmistresses would like to see in their pupils — impressed by the idea of starting a new life, imbued with a sense of her responsibilities and not without a modest hope of a life of happiness and prosperity.

But her responsibilities came first of course. Sitting in the train she had taken the time to go over them and she had been surprised to find them so many and so important. She had always had a sense of her responsibility as an elder sister, but Anne had saved her much in the way of effort and trouble by resolutely declining to recognize it. She had long feared that Anne was beyond her influence; the only thing to do was to leave her to Miss Layton, for whom Bess had the highest admiration, uncontaminated by the slightest grain of understanding. George and the others at school might be regarded as outside her range at present, except for the holidays. There remained her father — and Darcy.

For the first time Bess thought of her father as a person and not as a natural fact conditioning her environment. Immediately she was perplexed by a number of new ideas and impressions. Her father was almost like some one in a book: a widower, who had never remarried, living a retired even secluded life, devoted only to his estate (and his children, naturally), refusing to take his rightful established place in society, almost cut off from the usual contacts of civilization, with no

one to look after him, no one to talk to him, no one to brighten his great lonely house for him, no one to break him, gently, of those habits of solitude that had so grown on him, no one to induce him to return to the society of his equals. That is there *had* been no one; luckily, however he had a daughter. Two in fact, but only the most trusting could ever expect Anne to do anything with her responsibilities but disregard them. The responsibility was hers; she was the eldest; she could do much for her father. She was really touched by this belated appreciation of the pathos of her father's life. Why had he never married again? Though of course it would have been very unpleasant. Was it for his children's sake? But her mind, unconscious realist, refused to entertain this amiable fallacy. Nevertheless she was most earnestly resolved to let nothing stand in the way of her being the means of her father's restoration to a life of normal enjoyment, as much, that is, as any man of his age could expect to enjoy anything.

Bound up with her father were all the responsibilities that must belong to the daughter of a man with such an estate as Caldersham, duties to the poor, to the Church, to society, too numerous even to consider at present; so with a glance at only one or two of the most obvious ones Bess resolved to fulfil them all and passed on to her other special responsibility — Darcy.

She was surprised again to find how little she had ever thought about Darcy. She had always been sorry for him, of course, but he had never seemed to care for sympathy. Now she wondered what he did when every one had gone to school. Dr. Temple came, but only in the morning, and not every day; what did he do all the afternoon — and in the evening? Here was a gap for her to fill. Poor Darcy! And she had never thought of him.

It was true that he had always seemed careless and indifferent, but that might be only his manner; he had not been really properly brought up, you couldn't expect... he might be merely shy. Under that careless exterior there might be a heart crying out for sympathy. Oh, she had always been sorry for him, though it had been so hard to show it, especially without encouragement. When he looked at you and very nearly smiled it was so chilling. But now she would do everything. Nothing should discourage her. Poor Darcy, he could not be said ever to have had a mother. Though it was rather a pity that he should be not in the least handsome.

It was quite sobering to think how much they needed her, and she had hardly even suspected it. She ended her journey filled with the loftiest aims. She was to be helpful, consoling... She was spending these, the Christmas holidays, with a friend, the summer holidays with another, next year of course she would have her time taken up for the Season at least, but every other minute should be devoted to her father and Darcy.

Bess had not been at home very long before she found that she had underestimated the power of long-continued habit. It was not possible to induce her father to return to the society of his equals, gently; he would have to be dragged. Those habits of solitude must be overcome by energy, perseverance, force. It was not unlikely that the whole affair might turn out to be very wearing for every one concerned in it. Her father could not seem to feel the pathos of his position. He took pleasure, actually, in thinking of artificial manures and farming machinery; chiefly, it seemed, to condemn most of them. He allowed it to be inferred that he found the society of his equals boring; he could spend hours talking to labourers, hedgers, ditchers, drainers, any one who laid a finger on the land. He loved statistics; he

read all sorts of reports and disagreed with most of them heartily. He seemed to feel that he had a really fascinating life, engaged on all sorts of horrible experiments. When he did talk he expected any one to take an interest in Sir Horace Plunkett, in coöperative marketing in Ireland, although he was running things himself on entirely different lines, as he always said in the beginning. He talked about conditions in Holland and Denmark, even in the Colonies and the United States; he seemed to read books to get these sorts of remarks out of.

The only way to get him out of his rut was to make it plain that it was his duty to take her out occasionally and then to increase the number of occasions. And after all, wasn't it his duty?

He quite admitted it. And then, just as everything was going so well, when he had been persuaded to dine out once or twice, to take her to a dance, to have a few people to dinner — all of a suitable age, Bess saw to that — then, one day he came to her, looking so pleased with himself, as if he flattered himself that at last he was going to satisfy her, and that she must admit that he had been rather clever about it and considerate too; and then he told her that he had arranged with Aunt Fanny to take her about and see that she had a good time. He said Aunt Fanny was delighted with the idea. Now — wasn't — that — exactly — like — a — man?

After that Bess's acquaintance in the neighbourhood increased very rapidly, she had to admit that she had quite a good time, but her father's reintroduction to society had to be indefinitely postponed.

Darcy really was more satisfactory and yet, only in a way. He was not what they lead you to expect from an invalid. They are supposed to have an ivory pallor, which at least sounds interesting, whereas he was merely very white, sometimes almost a grey colour with a

bluish look, ugly and somehow startling too until you get used to it. They looked like white statues on some crusader's tomb; these people ought to see Darcy in his old blue linen dressing-gown; besides he was much too thin for any statue except perhaps the one of Henry VII in Westminster Abbey. And every one knows that Henry VII was not a lovable character — always collecting taxes. They had transparent hands at least; Darcy's merely showed the bones, his fingers never seemed to run into hand and they looked so long that they seemed endless. People sat on the edge of their beds and told them fairy stories that calmed them so that they went to sleep. Darcy would never have seen why you couldn't have stuck to the ordinary routine of sitting on a chair, and although he had read fairy stories with the children, she was sure that if any one had tried to calm him with one he would have laughed at them. In fact, that was the real difference between Darcy and the accepted idea of an invalid, he laughed too much. He found all sorts of things funny that you never would have thought of; in some ways, it seemed impossible to make him serious; he was incurably light-minded. Invalids are supposed to be irascible and sensitive, they often required soothing. Darcy was not only cheerful but imperturbable and as for soothing it was impossible to imagine any one so much as holding his hand; he was not affectionate.

And sensitive! He laughed readily and easily, making Bess laugh too, however unwillingly, at his legs that did not seem to belong to him and his clumsiness with his new crutches, so long that they had had to be made specially for him. Of course it was wonderful for him after spending so many, many months on his back; he must be so thankful; no wonder his spirits were high. It made you realize... no one had ever seen him like this.

Bess entered into the spirit of the thing heartily, she was so sincerely glad.

Still he appeared to regard it as merely an amusing game, and when he had succeeded in making them both helpless with laughter, he would leave it very readily to lie, looking extravagantly long, absurdly comfortable, with his hands behind his head, eyes half-closed and do nothing for hours. It was impossible to live with him long and not discover that Darcy's chief fault was laziness.

One knew that he had nothing to do but amuse himself and that he read a lot — always, one felt, vaguely, a waste of time; but to spend hours doing nothing or only pretending to read, half the time not even looking at the book he held in his hand, but somewhere out in the middle of space at nothing whatever! So that was what he did with his afternoons. Bess tried to provide him with some more rational amusement and succeeded fairly well; for though he was not particularly talkative himself he quite encouraged her to talk, and in this way she was glad to think she brought him into touch with the world.

It was much better than sewing alone in her own room and when she had nothing else to do Darcy could always depend on her to lighten his solitude. He did not appear extravagantly grateful, but that was his way. She often felt that she ought to give up some of her engagements for him, but as soon as she mentioned them he always refused to allow it.

But this was quite the least of the things she was able to do for him. Would he ever have learnt to use his crutches if it had not been for her? His laziness and lack of perseverance made it seem very unlikely. He was going to have to use them all his life. And yet it was always necessary for her to urge him on, to point out ad-

vantages that any one might have thought obvious. And though as time went on he really enjoyed the little things they were able to do together, it was still necessary always to remind him each time how much he had enjoyed it last time. Invalids fall into such habits of indolence. And yet you'd think they'd simply love the change.

Take the question of meals, for example; why should he be served alone upstairs, now? With his habit of reading at meals he was only too likely to forget to eat at all, and it was awfully silly to think of two sets of meals being served for three persons. He ate little enough as it was, he might as well eat nothing downstairs as upstairs. And he must make up his mind to do one thing or the other, because it made it so difficult for the housekeeper. The servants found it a grievance to have to do at intervals what they had just stopped doing regularly.

There was no doubt that Darcy was an addition to the dinner table. He was not particularly clever, yet when you got used to him he was amusing enough in a lazy, quiet way. Her father, too, talked more when Darcy was there and not always about the difficulties of adapting modern methods to specifically English conditions. And if he did Darcy was capable of sustaining the conversation without her assistance. He was capable even of seeming interested. Bess left it to him. She acknowledged that she did get tired of it. Why should he want new methods? She could not help wondering. None of her friends' fathers did. Was it quite . . . Very delicately she hinted this doubt to Darcy.

He astonished her by being quite rude. He said that she ought to be ashamed of herself for getting that sort of idea into her head, her father was worth all the tuppenny ha'penny 'gentlemen' in the Kingdom. And he

never even offered to apologize. But then she had begun to suspect Darcy of being quite unreasonable about her father.

Not that that was the only thing he was unreasonable about. Heavens no! The better you knew him the more unreasonable you found him. He did it on purpose. He simply had to be different from every one else in the world. It was a regular pose of his. And he would *argue;* that was the worst of him. Bess often found him very irritating.

But after all he was not always being original nor always lazy. And people always humour an invalid. And when he was neither posing nor arguing, he was really very nice — lounging on the couch enlarging his acquaintance by heresay, and it is really a comfort to have *some* one that appreciates the good points of gossip; sitting awkwardly three-corner-wise on his chair at dinner, laughing at her father — really, when you got used to his manner you discovered that he thought he could say anything; smoking too much wherever he was — she had to tell her father and he did not take it very well, and as far as she could see did nothing about it either; yes, on the whole, he was rather a dear and it would have been very dull at home without him.

Of course in the holidays when he could get hold of the boys he never gave her another thought. It was just like him and it would have been very ungrateful, only she happened to be rather busy that summer herself.

He was really marvellously better when she came back from Devon, and with the new car it was possible to give him his first sight of their country-side. Of course you had to get him used to the car at first and that was tedious. Bess would have been glad to take him about more and many of her friends would have been quite kind to him, but he was not good with new

people, his manner was unfortunate, so indifferent, cold, frightfully stand-offish, really rather out of place, considering. And almost always he refused invitations. So what could you expect? People might be interested to see him, having heard something about him, but Darcy took good care that they should not remain interested. Bess felt quite like scolding him for it. Still, she was really bringing him out in spite of himself. And then ——

'Where did you go this afternoon?' said her father, in a perfunctory way that no one would have suspected.

It had been a hot day; it was still, uncommonly hot; they were both trying to keep cool waiting for dinner. Darcy was upstairs still; and Bess was afraid that she knew from experience that he was going to be late. He had been late often lately. Her father was more patient about it than she would have been. Bess idly filled in the time with the account of her afternoon.

'You see he said how gratifying it must be to you, as a staunch Conservative, when you reflected that you were so nearly an inhabitant of Disraeli's "beechy Bucks."' Her father appeared to listen to this indulgently and although it was rather cheek it was not hers. 'And so I thought — although he tried to pretend — he said that although naturally he had the highest admiration for the man's talent as a financier he was really a socialist, but I knew he was joking. So I thought he ought to see Hughenden.'

'You took him over to Hughenden!' said her father quickly.

'Oh, we did it very easily, with the car, in the afternoon, and I had warned him all along that I shouldn't let him get out. And the roads were really quite good except near ——'

'What did you do on Saturday?' said her father abruptly.

Bess was startled. 'Only went over to the Cockburns, for tennis.'

'You took him with you?'

'He was very comfortable sitting in the sun with old Mrs. A'Court.'

'You kept him sitting there in the heat all the afternoon? Did it ever occur to you to think of his back?'

'I wanted to come home earlier,' she was alarmed now. 'But he wouldn't let me spoil the set.'

'No doubt you said to him, "I suppose you're comfortable, wouldn't you like to come home, it would spoil the set." How can you expect any one on earth to accept that sort of invitation?'

He was really very angry and unfair. It appeared that he had gone into the North-West Room and found Darcy lying down instead of getting ready for dinner. Which after all was just like him. But her father talked about Darcy being exhausted, and things being bad for him, and even spoke of sending for the doctor. And of course it was all her fault.

'You understand,' he finished, speaking sternly, 'that you are not to keep him out for your own convenience, among strangers, and that you are never to take him out in the car without asking my permission and telling me how far you intend to go, and never to go any farther. I will not have you risking his health for nothing and I will not have him at the mercy of your carelessness and lack of consideration. He is dining upstairs. I —' before she could protest — 'I have seen to that myself.'

It was then that Bess began to suspect her father of being unreasonable about Darcy. Under these circumstances there was nothing to prevent her going away in September.

CHAPTER XXI

CHOICE

Bess came back from the Heywoods' trying to resolve a most tremendous problem. Which ought she to do, get engaged and probably have to give up the London Season, or try to get the Season in before getting engaged? There seemed no way really of deciding it and it was a thing quite needing attention. The annoying part of it was that if it had not been for Aunt Fanny's nerves she ought to have come out last year. Of course then it would have been over but she would have had it. Now it began to look as if she might not have it at all. For of course it is never the same after you are married, and Billy seemed to have no idea of not getting married immediately.

Which ought she to choose? She wanted very badly to do both. And there was no one to consult, that would be the least good, except perhaps — Darcy? It was quite outside his line, how could he know anything about... He might laugh, he might — oh, it would be impossible. Still in the end she did just mention it.

To her surprise he took it seriously. Most people can be trusted to laugh at you about getting engaged, but not Darcy, evidently. She couldn't even tell whether she had surprised him or not. He had not seemed to be even listening while she was explaining her dilemma, but as soon as she had come to a stop he commenced a relentless examination of her, chiefly, it seemed, on the point of Billy's character. Bess had never thought of it before, but under his shower of acute and very pointed

questions she quite surprised herself by the extent of her actual knowledge of Billy — character, tastes, habits, family, sentiments, finances. He wanted all and more than she could tell him. He made a patient listener to her rather faltering relation on this inexhaustible subject. When he had come to the end of his questions Darcy gave thought his undivided attention for a moment and then —

'Have you any reason to believe that he would object to it — the Season, I mean?'

Bess was not too sure of anything but she seemed to think she thought so.

'No man has a right to tell you what to do,' said Darcy promptly. 'I should go. Of course.'

'It is inconsiderate of him, isn't it?' said Bess, with a vague but growing sense of injury.

Darcy was down on it like a hawk. 'Very. Seeing he's only paying you the compliment of wanting to marry you.'

Bess could only look at him in astonishment.

'I should go, of course, if I wanted to. And I'd refuse him, immediately. Write to him to-night and say you've thought it over and so forth. It's the only thing you can do.'

'But —' said Bess, rather breathlessly.

'If there's any question,' said Darcy ruthlessly, 'about anything on earth that you'd rather do, there is no question about it. The least you can do is to refuse him. In common fairness to him. In common decency. *You* can't let him take the risk of finding himself stuck for life with a woman who likes him rather less on the whole than a couple of balls, some dinners, a garden party, the theatre, and a few clothes. After all the man's offered you whatever he's capable of offering you. This isn't a game. If you can't do anything for him the least you

can do is to give him the chance of finding some one else who can.'

'Billy would never marry any one else,' said Bess stiffly.

'My good girl,' said Darcy suavely, 'do you expect him to stay unmarried for the rest of his life simply because you turn him down?'

Bess on the whole couldn't exactly see why not.

'I might point out to you that baronets are rather in the habit of marrying at some time or other. And under the circumstances you can't want him not to, not in decency,' said Darcy firmly.

Bess could.

'But hang it all. That's beastly unfair. Because you can't favour him must he get along with nothing the rest of his life? As a matter of fact he won't, but whatever he does *you* have nothing to say to it. Good Lord, try to consider the poor chap's side of it for once.'

'I don't see why I have to do all the considering,' said Bess, very bright-eyed. 'Besides people often do.'

'Do what?'

'Not get married.'

'If you think,' said Darcy grimly, 'that you can take it and leave it, play with his honest expectations, and get him in the end, you deserve anything that can happen to you for mucking with this poor fellow's chances. I don't say anything about yours because you are taking your own risks. The best thing that can happen to you is to find that he's changed his mind in the interval.'

'People don't change their minds in a few days,' said Bess not too stoutly.

'Don't they!'

'Besides he's just said that he wants to marry me. That means ever so much longer.'

'H'm,' said Darcy cryptically. 'Let him be sure he

has no chance and see what happens. Of course if you're going to play him for a fool and encourage him I've nothing more to say. It's about the rottenest thing you could do, and I warn you that it takes experience *and* luck to be able to do that sort of thing and not find yourself let in, somehow or other, in the end. Of course you know the man and I don't. You may feel that you can take care of him easily. Did he strike you as easily managed?'

Bess could say nothing. Unfortunately if Billy was anything it was not that.

'Whatever you do,' said Darcy, 'the point is this. This man has given what proof he can of having good intentions (I'm assuming that he's not marrying you for your money because he's obviously not), the only decent thing you can do in return is to think only of his position. If you can consider taking chances with his honest offer you have no right to take the risk of marrying him.'

'But I want to!'

'He may not thank you, now,' said Darcy rigorously. 'But he ought to.'

Bess was reduced to tears and the desolate knowledge that if Billy were to change his mind she really didn't know what she should do. And still, she did want the Season.

Darcy, on the facts becoming apparent, retired once more into the fastnesses of meditation.

'Sure you won't want to change your mind?'

'Quite sure,' said Bess unhappily.

'I should write to him,' said Darcy lazily, with eyes half-shut. 'Tell him you'll marry him in London — say the tenth or eleventh of July, you know when the Season's over better than I do. Go up as early as you like and do all the usual things.'

'Darcy!' she gasped, dazzled. 'Will he do it?'

'Why not? There's no reason why he shouldn't go up too, is there? Let him give you a good time. Your family naturally doesn't see the idea of rushing things. Tell him you've got to have clothes.'

'But Darcy, will they let us?'

'His father's dead, his mother doesn't object, he's twenty-five, he's come into his property and he has a free hand with it, he seems a decent chap, any one would say he was perfectly justified in marrying. And a title of sorts to carry on. Why not?'

'Darcy, I think it's the most glorious idea I ever heard of!'

'So do I,' said Darcy, smiling. A very nice look really, kind and straight and a quiet, friendly smile. He said it so simply and naturally and yet in a way gently, you would almost have thought that it was he that was the older. Somehow the tears came to Bess's eyes. He had such nice manners. Any one could see that it was not put on.

'And I do hope it will be all right!'

'So do I,' said Darcy, again, quite fervently this time. There was something about the way he spoke that made you — a new idea darted through her mind; suppose he had been... Poor boy! And she had never thought of that.

'Do you want me to tell your father?'

'Oh, Darcy, will you?' She had been secretly oppressed all along by the thought of her father. He would be sure to be formidable. 'Oughtn't Billy to?'

'Nonsense, you want everything settled before you write. About London, at any rate.'

'Oh, you are a dear.' He seemed ready to leave instantly. 'Hadn't we better let him have his dinner first?'

'I'll have to go and dress if we're ever to have any.' He laughed. 'Can you keep it a secret till then?'

As he was going she stopped him. 'Darcy... thank you. I don't know what I should have done if I'd let him go and change his mind.'

'You are a nice child, Bess,' said Darcy astonishingly.

CHAPTER XXII

HIS UNCLE'S DAUGHTER

'Don't faint, sir,' said Darcy warningly. 'Bess wants to get married.'

'What!'

'His name is Bill — William Farley; he's by way of being a baronet.'

'Are you joking?' said his uncle. He was incredulous, though it was not exactly their form of humour to ——

'His income,' said Darcy regretfully, 'isn't perhaps what you might expect but I suppose it'll do.'

'He must be independent if he expects to marry now. Bess is not an heiress.' His daughters would have something of course. But the man had given evidence of moderation in his views. He must have had some idea of the position of affairs before he went into it.

'Oh, I should say they'd have enough to live on. He has property near the Heywoods'. Very decent one, I believe.'

Satisfactory in a way. But one must not allow oneself to be put off the track by superficially satisfactory circumstances. Parental duty calls for more than this. 'So that was where she met him?'

'I gathered that she met him there last Christmas, met, that is, in any effective sense. He was always there, a friend of the family. And curiously enough,' said Darcy solemnly, 'this summer while she was in Devonshire with the Calverleighs, he happened to be staying there too, quite near them.'

'I know nothing about the fellow,' remarked his uncle.

'The Heywoods like him.'

'I know nothing about the Heywoods except that they send their daughter to the same school ——'

'The Calverleighs liked him.'

'I know very little more about the Calverleighs.'

'I should say,' said Darcy hastily, to avert a growing impression of neglect, 'from what I could get out of Bess, that he was all right in his way. She knows a good bit about what's going on if you can only get it straightened out.' He went over the qualities he had gathered from her effort at description. 'Twenty-six, not very exciting, knows what he wants and how to get it (evidently), steady-going, does all the proper things. You would have said that he'd be exactly what Bess is asking for.'

'What is the matter with him then?' said his uncle promptly. It was natural to infer that there was something from Darcy's valedictory method of presentation.

'That's the funny part of it, sir,' said Darcy ingenuously. 'There isn't anything.'

They gazed at one another solemnly. John Darcy was aware that if he continued to meet that wide, over-innocent eye he was in danger of surrendering his dignity. There was nothing funny in the situation. That was not at all the attitude, nothing could be more unsuitable than to import a sort of sentiment not at all in keeping with the simple facts of the case. His glance wavered, returned, he caught the dawn of brilliant comedy replacing innocence in his nephew's eye and wrenched his own away.

'His mother,' said Darcy mellifluously, 'likes her.'

'Naturally,' said his uncle austerely.

'Oh, of course. They,' said Darcy, looking away — 'They w-want to get married in July. No use making it a long engagement. He doesn't believe in it.'

'Engagement?' said his uncle very gravely. 'Has she accepted him?'

'Not definitely. Not without your consent, sir,' Darcy was virtuously shocked.

'It must be only conditional,' said his uncle firmly. 'I shall invite him down.'

'Seven months,' said Darcy reflectively. 'No one could say that it was — that it was too short. Of course she'd have to go up to town with Aunt Fanny, earlier, say April or May to get things done. Bess thought,' casually, 'it might be more convenient to be married there.'

'A good idea,' said his uncle absently. He was haunted by the feeling that something had been overlooked; groping, he found it with some embarrassment. 'Is she ——' he began rather uncomfortably.

'Well, it looks as if I rather shoved her into it in a way,' said Darcy. 'But if you ask me nothing could have persuaded her not to.' He reflected passingly. 'Yes. Rather more than she has any idea of, I think.'

It had been unnecessary to assume that the boy had overlooked it. He overlooked nothing. John Darcy felt comfortably all the convenience of having so reliable a deputy, for a daughter is an embarrassment at any time, and to be forced to inquire into the state of her affections!

'Bess,' said Darcy, with an accent of grave benevolence, 'Bess would be suitable.'

Their eyes met. They smiled irrepressibly, a kindly mixture of sympathy, comfort and circumspection, a smile in which mutual congratulation could not appear for it had been obliterated, replaced by a little real feeling, something more than amused comprehension, for Bess, that — there is no other word for it — that nice child.

Before she left Caldersham Bess took leave of Darcy, for naturally there had been no question of his coming up for the wedding, with sorrowing and rather regretful finality. She had had, with, she hoped, all delicacy and consideration, to convey by her manner that this was the end of what had been, somewhat unsuitably perhaps, an almost sisterly relation. He must, however, learn to face the fact that he could not expect it to continue and to realize that in future they must meet more or less as strangers who had become friends. It must be so, if only for his own good. He saw everything as she could have wished and seemed to be completely resigned.

It was not only on his account as it happened, for Billy unfortunately, almost as if he had guessed, had taken a dislike to Darcy from the very beginning. And as he continued to come down for week-ends he continued to find fresh occasions confirming his dislike.

It was not only, as he pointed out to her often enough, that Darcy talked too much for a boy of his age, and in his position, expressing outrageous opinions — Darcy's deplorable originality had, indeed, been only too noticeable — with unbecoming freedom, arguing, displaying at all times an inability to let the subject drop, but that his cheek was azurean, abysmal, unfathomable, in a word, frightful, though masked and as it were ambushed behind his damned respectful manner. And that he presumed under cover of his affliction, abominably. Billy had thought that she ought to speak to her father about it, to tell him that he was letting Darcy get out of hand — really his assurance! A boy of twenty to be allowed to laugh at his uncle; and not only his uncle. Unfortunately Billy, not being used to Darcy's way of expressing himself, had jumped to the conclusion only too often that Darcy was laughing at him, when how could he have been?

Bess had done her best to soothe him. She could not explain to him why it was impossible for her (as of course it was) to go to her father about it, or to explain her father's indulgence, the way he accepted without appearing to notice anything Darcy's habit of saying almost everything. Really sometimes to hear him you would have thought that there was not even any difference in age — let alone anything else. It was really clever of Billy to notice it; she had not seen it for a long time herself. And she had never really liked it either. Nevertheless his — well, his affliction must be held to account for it. People who were used to him made allowances.

There was no use suggesting that though; the complexion of Billy's thought soon took on a darker hue. The boy was clever. He knew undoubtedly which side his bread was buttered on; no doubt either that he had discovered how to get at any one so important to himself and his prospects. Billy made no secret of his conviction that this feat of Darcy's, alone, entitled him to rank as devilish clever. Let him go on as he was going and he would begin to have Influence. It was natural, perhaps, for him to try to make sure of his own future; but it would be sensible for the natural heirs to make sure themselves that he could not endanger theirs. You could say he was exaggerating, but he was merely looking forward. Had she noticed how often, in spite of his fooling, Darcy was simply putting forward her father's opinions as if they were his own? Oh, he understood him all right, they understood one another too well. One didn't like to see it.

Bess tried to distract his attention. She was developing quite a talent for it. As soon as one saw premonitory traces of the conversational advent of Darcy or her father one finessed to erase them from his mind. How

could she explain to Billy that he was doing Darcy an injustice, when he disliked him quite enough already? How could she let him know how thankful she had often been for Darcy's astonishing ability to divert, to capture her father's attention simply by talking his nonsense? How could she suggest that for Darcy to say a thing in a manner that no one could take seriously was the only way to prevent her father's saying it with crushing force and disastrous effect? How could she have explained their understanding ever since that first dreadful dinner when it had burst on them that on all questions of Land Billy and her father were diametrically opposed?

'Buck up, my girl,' said Darcy, after the event. 'All we've got to do is to keep them off the Land.'

'All!' said Bess, depressed by the idea of keeping two men off the one subject of primary interest to both of them.

'You look after Billy and I'll take care of your father. After all,' said Darcy hopefully, 'they both hunt.'

No, Bess could never explain, but she was learning to temporize: 'After all Dad's done for him, you know, the least Darcy can do is to try to please him. It isn't as if he was at all a scheming sort of person. And I don't think he's clever, Billy. He isn't, really. He's awfully simple when you know him. And not even practical. Every one says so.'

Billy shook his head, forebodingly. Nothing was more useful than a reputation of that sort. The fellow was deeper than he looked. Did she remember the other day? He had been waiting on the terrace for her; she had gone out the other door without noticing that either of them was out there. 'I swung down over the balustrade and caught up with you and then found that I had left my crop and had to go back for it? When I got back he was still sitting on the balustrade, looking

at his foot — damned bad habit of his, calls attention to it — looking at his lame foot with a sort of grin on his face. You can say what you like, but it looks a bit fishy for a chap to sit and smile when he's alone, as if he had some devilish secret of his own. A young chap like that too!'

'You must have been saying something funny,' said Bess unwarily. 'He's always finding things funny that no one would have thought were.'

'Confound his impertinence,' said Billy very heartily. 'What gives him the right to exercise his idea of wit on your father's guests? I tell you I'm tired of the way he looks at one as if — ' Billy tried fruitlessly for some tellingly condemnatory description, failed to find it and fell back rather lamely on — 'as if he *saw* you, you know.'

'I know,' said Bess understandingly. 'He's always done that. You get used to it. It doesn't mean anything except that he's listening. Really, Billy, he likes you. He told me the other day that he liked to see you walk. He said that for a man of your weight you moved splendidly.' She had had enough experience by now to suppress the end of the sentence — 'but not as well as your father.' But even with this judicious omission William Farley's opinion of Darcy had not been noticeably affected.

And so it was just as well that Darcy could not come up for the wedding. But he had been such a help all along and he took her meaning so easily and bravely, keeping up his spirits marvellously to the very last minute, that Bess felt quite melancholy about leaving him. Poor dear, what would he do with no one to look after him?

'Good-bye, Darcy,' she said rather tremulously, and risked her whole previous effect by kissing him.

'My child!' said Darcy feelingly. He was not nearly as much surprised as she was, though, if he did pretend it was unexpected. And he was such a dear; his hair was so nice, bright and alive and vigorous-looking, even if Billy did think there was too much of it, and his skin, even quite close to, was so beautifully clean-looking and he did everything so naturally, not in the least awkward or embarrassed about it, that she made the discovery — rather a desolating one under the circumstances — that it might be more satisfactory to be kissed by Darcy than to be kissed by Billy, though curiously not exciting.

And Billy would never have understood it if he had seen her sitting on Darcy's knee and crying on his shoulder, but somehow or other... leaving everything... and not having a mother... But Billy would never have understood it.

'It does you no good to knock about too much with Bess,' Darcy was left telling himself with some firmness. 'It makes you feel too intelligent.' A here-let-me-show-you-how sort of business... If you start being superior you're done. The thing was simply a morass. He was not displeased by the phrase — the morass of superiority. Well, Billy was in. A man who knew what he wanted. A vaguely enviable state to Darcy, at present, for *he* was often so far from knowing that it was only occasionally that it penetrated what it was that he did not want.

All the same it was just as well to have somebody being suitable. It was a thousand to one that Anne was never going to be.

Nothing to do and nothing, properly considered, to worry about. Darcy was almost in danger of being able to catch up with himself again. Millions of things to do, of course, but it was quite unlikely that he would ever

do them. All the time in the world; what a gorgeous thing it is! His uncle would be in late to lunch; sure to be on a day like this. Bess could never have broken him of it.

Nice child, of course... Take any amount of training though. Darcy assured himself defensively and not without some feeling that defence might well be called for, that he had not had the time. Billy was hardly perhaps... hopelessly one-sided. His weaknesses were hers already. Half-heartedly he tried to stifle the conviction that Bess would be more and more like Aunt Fanny. She need not have been. Perhaps *she* need not either. Oh, damn — pity her mother died.

Suddenly he was struck helpless with silent laughter. Life blindly, persistently, remorselessly, almost, it seemed, hopefully, presenting him with these opportunities — and only these. Jean, Jim, George, and now Bess! But that he had, perhaps pardonably, declined. It was impossible to resist the conclusion that he should have been born a woman — and a mother. 'Lord — and the hash you make of it!'

At any rate no one could expect to be a mother to Anne. Luckily. Darcy — it was getting to be too usual with him — found himself edging away from the possibility of remembering a suggestion of Valmont's, with a sort of vague uneasiness. It is no use not remembering a thing if you are going to do it rather too resolutely. Still it had been unnecessary for him to say 'magnificent.' Anne was all right, of course, any one could see that, but it could have nothing conceivably to do with one personally.

As for anything else, there was nothing in it. Anne would get over it. Although it might well be thought a source of real uneasiness that Anne had never been in the habit of getting over any of her ideas. People learnt

to accept what was inevitable as they grew up. As for himself, Darcy knew enough by this time to accept with equanimity a future of little more than unlimited Agriculture and his uncle, to have no doubt that they would prove sufficient for any one, and to make this assertion, on the whole, rather too forcibly.

CHAPTER XXIII

HIS UNCLE'S NEPHEW

JOHN DARCY survived the unusual exertion of putting his daughter on the train, although, since his daughter had been travelling with her aunt, exertion had not been an unduly bitter description of the experience. He survived and, as he turned his horse mechanically to take the Home Farm on his way, he was discovered to be surprisingly cheerful.

It could hardly be said that there was any good reason why he should not be cheerful. It was properly no occasion for surprise that his daughter should marry. And marry — whatever could be said against him — an entirely unexceptionable young man of her own choice.

Again nothing could be said against their arrangements, nor was there any one to dispute his sister's right to undertake them. The wedding itself... At any rate a business of that sort is soon over. And may well be counted sufficient unto the day.

As for his other responsibilities — not least among them those he had deliberately brought down upon himself — they could not, just now, be looked on either as immediately pressing or particularly unpromising, thus becoming to all practical purposes non-existent. Life appeared at the moment, perhaps deceptively, simplified; his own house, as he returned to it with an appetite for lunch, seemed quiet, spacious, restful, in his eyes.

The boy himself, for all the shocking bad time he had

had, was undoubtedly very much better. And over in Sutton Mansfield the son of old Sir William was said to be thinking of selling.

Darcy, spending the afternoon on his back — to an unprejudiced observer he might have appeared to have been asleep for most of it, very little to show for it certainly — flat on his back, with a mind not altogether unconcerned with the odd million things he was probably never going to do, and the millions of people — all different — known only to himself, the only evidence of whose existence lay scattered on all the spare scraps of paper he could lay his hands on, on the backs of envelopes, the ends of letters, pages torn out of old notebooks, and most of them lost by now, anyway, Darcy, under these circumstances, found rather unaccountably at the end of it that time had somehow managed to get ahead of him.

'I should not take the trouble to come down.'

It was his uncle, uncompromising evidence in black and white, standing over him.

'What! I was just going off to change.' His still lighted cigarette described something of the circle species through the air as he came up on his elbow hastily. The clock was undoubtedly very much against him.

'I should leave it for to-night,' said his uncle.

For the moment it seemed rather too noticeably unnecessary.

Darcy checked, suspended judgment; weighing it for the moment, with a reflective but not actively inquiring mind.

'I shall want the details about the Barham farm. All we have, please.'

'Well, I can do that, of course.' Darcy made a long arm, ran through a contiguous drawer of the desk and

sank back luxuriously to consider his materials. Now what the devil, said Darcy to himself, is up in Sutton Mansfield?

So Darcy dined in conspicuous comfort upstairs once more, and there his uncle joined him afterwards for their old ceremony of coffee. And there was, most admirably, about their thoroughly business-like proceeding, no possible hint of celebration to indicate that in this atmosphere, dense with the companionship of smoke, two peacefully irreclaimable men had put back the clock a year.

Agriculture at an end, they lingered, conscious of the comfort of this reversion to old habits, aware of something valedictory in the very occasion of it. For this must be their last time. They could relive the simulacrum of the old relation but once. The change in Darcy's definitely dining downstairs and alone with his uncle was not great, but the difference was nevertheless a real one. Darcy was no longer an invalid. It was true that he was not strong. He could not face a life of even normal activity, but that would never be required of him. Still there were many things now open to him that had been beyond his reach. He was no longer helpless. That was the difference and that is the greatest difference in the world.

One could only be thankful, of course. Still the old relation had had much in it that was good, vital, and necessary, to both of them. It was worth one backward step to retrace the road by which they had come, one effort to recover, to recall and commemorate the past. New life began to-morrow, and although it could never be divorced from the past, what in the future, with its more complicated, more intimate contact with actuality, could replace for them what they had found in hard and unsatisfactory circumstances?

'If you're thinking,' said Darcy, after a short silence, 'of taking over Sutton Mansfield —— Are you thinking of taking it over as a whole, sir?'

It was undeniable that his uncle was thinking of it in that way.

'Then we shall have our work cut out,' said Darcy. 'That is, of course, you will. Has he let it run down, sir? Do you happen to know?'

'I know,' said his uncle, aroused, 'that it is not at all in good condition.'

'The price will go up all the same if they know you're after it.'

This also was indisputable. John Darcy's known propensities kept the price of land up far beyond the usual market value in their part of the country. He had considered it of course, in this instance. The agent, if he bought through an agent, had better be one not known generally as his. Although after he had thought it over it seemed —— 'I decided to see the man myself.'

'Sale negotiated by private treaty,' said Darcy pensively. 'Well, he's in luck. He'd never have got as much from any one else.'

'One hates to see the old families go,' said his uncle quietly.

Darcy disassociated himself from this point of view, promptly: 'The land'll be a lot better off with you than with a man that's only too glad to get the chance to sell it.'

John Darcy acknowledged this slur on the character of the son of an old acquaintance, silently. It was well enough deserved. And it was one he was calculated to feel the importance of. This sort of thing happened every day. And even in cases where interest was not altogether absent —— He himself would have at least

one son-in-law to whom he would never care to entrust any part of his property. If anything were to happen... he was not in the habit of considering it. But George was undoubtedly too young. The thought barely crossed his mind — if his eldest daughter had been an eldest son. For he might have been no more satisfactory.

'I shall get you to go into it with me, to-morrow,' he said aloud, absently.

Darcy laughed. He was ready for anything. It was true that he knew enough already to make him a useful auxiliary.

With this new work in hand he could be very useful. He had always been very willing. He had borne far more than his share of the burden of recent events. John Darcy was under no illusion as to the degree of exhaustion concealed — or revealed — by Darcy's reputed laziness. It had been a severe trial coming at a time when he was least well able to bear it. One accepted perhaps more than one ought. The relief had been great.

John Darcy acknowledged that he had not been capable of changing his way of living so late in life. What he did not acknowledge — what could never have been acknowledged by a man with such excellent control over his conscious mind as John Darcy, was that in the last year's long unconscious comparison between John Winteringham's son and John Darcy's daughter it had come to be less a comparison than a contrast, and that not one strikingly in favour of his own daughter. Nor would it perhaps have been acknowledged that this was preëminently John Winteringham's son. He had come so far from the feelings he had first had on that subject that it could not seem at all possible that they were those of the same man.

So they lingered talking idly to prolong the sense of

renewing for the time being their old unself-conscious association. So silently they kept an unknown anniversary, since neither was capable of the exactly sentimental formality it would have taken to remind them of any specified number of days, months, or years that had passed since a most unwilling uncle had set out for Paris.

THE END

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THREE AGAINST FATE

By Mary Agnes Hamilton

JEAN CLAVIGER, happily married to Harold, finds her security suddenly swept away when her husband returns from the Front on leave. He is a stranger to her, silent, aloof. After he has gone she tries to forget her fears. Stephen, a pacifist friend, helps her to find interests outside of her own problems. He falls in love with her, and Harold, finding them together, shoots him in a sudden fury. Then comes the trial. As the lawyers weave their case of twisted facts and motives, Jean broods at home, searching through her past life for the real cause of the tragedy, and planning for its atonement.

'Three Against Fate' is no ordinary story of physical action, but a drama of the mind — of an inner struggle so intense, so vital, that one is held spellbound until the end. Jean and Harold, each in the dark as to the other's thoughts, groping blindly, struggling against forces neither of them fully understands — these Miss Hamilton draws with remarkable clearness and tremendous power.

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